

Corinne of Corrall's Bluff



BY
MARION
MILLER
KNOWLES



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CORINNE OF CORRALL'S
BLUFF



Yours earnestly,
MARION KUHN

CORINNE OF CORRALL'S BLUFF

BY

MARION MILLER KNOWLES

Author of

*"Songs from the Hills" (two editions), "Fronds from the Blacks'
Spur," "Barbara Halliday," etc.*



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Corinne of Corral's Bluff

CHAPTER I.

A DAUGHTER OF NEPTUNE.

"Her only music was the voice of waves,
Her playthings were the shells she found in rocky caves;
Imagination on a seagull's wing
Flew with her yearning thoughts, and taught her every-
thing!"

Knowing nothing of any country save Australia, but born in a lighthouse, and reared on the rocks with the seagulls, with ancestry behind her whose lives had been precariously spent as fishermen in wave-lashed islands off the coast of France, Corinne Courboules looked a typical sailor's daughter, with her bright, boyish face, wide-opened, frank blue eyes, and lithe, erect figure, of an easy swinging grace, that suggested strength of muscle as of character.

Sebastien Courboules, it is true, had spent most of his reckless existence on the goldfields, not on

the sea, but when more ill-luck than good had followed on his footsteps, and the energy of youth had deserted his big frame, the memories of boyhood, ever restless, ever surging over his heart, had sent him coastwards, craving for a touch of salt spray on his face and the familiar voice of the sea in his world-weary ears.

As a lighthouse-keeper he lived contentedly enough for some years; then his wife died and an only son, Antoine, followed her. Then Sebastien's heart began to wither within him, and he grew tired of the lonely days within the lighthouse; so, having saved a little money, he "bought out" the owner of the refreshment rooms further up the coast, where, during the summer season, tourists came from all parts for weeks, and even months, at a time, and anyone with business capacities could manage to make a good livelihood out of them.

The refreshment rooms were situated on the most sheltered part of Corral's Bluff, and had been strongly, if not very picturesquely, built. On the seaward side the rocks were high, rough and jagged, and, in wild weather, the waves dashed furiously against their bulwarks and flung their spray in glistening fountains within touch of the house itself. In mild weather the hollows inside these rocks were the haunts of admiring families, who did their best to destroy their natural beauty by probing the opalescent pools to drag forth seaweed and shells and unfortunate shellfish, as well as

other trophies of their restless energies. Most of these tourists went in for a regular course of sea-bathing, and on the ravenous appetites thus engendered, the Courboules depended for their means of living. They supplied every sort of meal required, and at all hours. As Sebastien grew older and feebler, the bulk of the work fell almost entirely on Corinne. The only coffee palace was over a mile away, and it was the general thing for visitors accommodated there to spend the whole day out on the beach, and patronise "Old Sebastien's" for luncheon, afternoon tea, and "soft" drinks.

So Corinne saw plenty of company of a kind, and, as she was a girl of quick intelligence and very adaptable, she soon picked up a fair amount of education. Her father had not troubled himself much about her "schooling," as she was "only a girl," but he had taught her his own language well enough to enable her to speak it correctly, and with the proper accent, whenever occasion required; and he had taught her how to read better than any ordinary teacher could have done, and also how to distinguish good literature from bad. She always welcomed the proffered loan of a book from a sea-side visitor with eagerness, though her time for reading was necessarily limited; and when she had an hour or two at her disposal, she would take it with her, seek out one of her favourite rocky haunts, and devour its contents. Returning, she would breast the wind with wild exhilaration in her

healthy young blood—glad to be alive, feeling glorious possibilities awaiting her, wondering how, and when, and where the romance of life would find her, and whether it would be her woman's lot to "love and suffer bitter woe," or "to the uttermost parts of earth to go, unloving and unloved."

Sometimes she would swim as far out in the threatening waves as she dared, glorying in her strength of lung and limb, and in her capacity for venturing each. Ambition, stirring in her awakening woman's nature, prompted her to seize all of the good of living that she legitimately could. Ambition made her interested in everybody and everything; she wanted to learn all that could be taught from the human and the natural around her.

For this reason, she listened to the longest-winded yarn without being tired; for this reason, she examined closely every object of nature that came in her way. Though she loved the sea with all the strength of her beautiful young body, she hoped one day to travel away from it—far, far inland, into the great world's heart, to see the "life" she had so often heard her father speak of to wanderers who, like himself, had had their little "day."

Boys' books of adventure and volumes of travel were her delight—breathing, as they did, of dangers to be met with and combated, of the customs of strange peoples to be dared and conquered. Sebastian little knew how his daughter's brain teemed with romantic fancies! He was stern and exacting,

but expected nothing more from her than domestic duties, performed with filial affection and respect. He did not tell her the curious tales and legends that he told the men, who were never weary of his stories and remembrances of France. But they reached her ears, all the same, and gave colour to the dull routine of the busy days at Corrall's Bluff.

That Corinne should, and must, marry, was a fixed idea in her father's mind. His shrewd old eyes were ever on the watch for a suitable suitor, and it nettled him more than Corinne knew that she put on her most offhand manner whenever an admirer approached her. The thought of her being left to fight the world alone after his death was becoming more and more of a nightmare to him; yet it was too late to risk the little he had in a business in a more thickly-populated district. It was a consolation to him that Corinne possessed at least one suitor who had the power to provide her with a comfortable home, should she not say him nay.

Jim Barr was the son of the proprietor of the coffee palace—a popular young fellow enough, but rather plain of feature and slow of speech. Corinne never gave him a second thought, and he knew it; but he worshipped her in his quiet way, and never let an opportunity pass of “drawing up” at the Bluff when out driving or riding. He had the usual country store and hotel combined, and assisted his father in between whiles, when business was brisk in the tourist season. He dressed better than most

of the folk about the scattered district, and quarrelled with no man. To Sebastien's observant mind he was "solid and square"—the sort of man who made a faithful husband and a good provider. So he always made him heartily welcome, however often he called. But he couldn't force Corinne to admire the big, silent man, strive how he would, and "the courting" progressed very slowly.

One unusually hot summer Corral's Bluff was so crowded with visitors from the city that old James Barr had to send two of the "overflow" down to the refreshment rooms to see if "a shakedown" could be made up for them at Sebastien's till he had a vacancy for them. Corinne strongly objected, as she had her hands full as it was, and no practical help but that of a friend's little girl of twelve, who was on a visit to her. However, Sebastien, who was beginning to get greedy after florins, desired her to oblige Barr by managing for a week, and she reluctantly fixed up the only private sitting-room they possessed for the young men, who said they were medical students from Melbourne.

Corinne took very little notice of the strangers for a day or so, apart from attending to their meals, which she served up as daintily as she knew how; then she suddenly became aware that the elder of the two possessed quite a remarkable share of good looks, and, moreover, that his full, dark eyes had a way of looking into hers that was, to say the least of it, embarrassing.

To find herself blushing under any man's gaze was annoying in the extreme to Corinne; so she promptly gave Hugh Allingham "the cold shoulder" in her own breezy way, and addressed any remarks she felt called upon to utter to his friend, Laurence Hayes, who, though of a less reserved type, never seemed to trouble himself with gazing at her. But, however coolly she treated Hugh Allingham, it made no difference in his very evident admiration for her. To all appearances, he had fallen hopelessly in love with her. When the week ended, he manifested no desire to remind James Barr of his promise to make room for him and his companion, but announced to Sebastien his intention of remaining a month if he saw his way to still accommodate himself and friend, as he had so satisfactorily done so far. They would "give no trouble," he said, and they were willing to pay as much again, in order that they might be allowed to remain in their comfortable quarters.

"Oh, father, it is unreasonable of you to expect me to bother about them when there is so much to do!" Corinne expostulated; but old Sebastien had taken a liking to the two gentlemanly young fellows, and would not hear of their being turned adrift.

"Rosalie can stay on as long as she likes, and help you. What is her home? Bah! Her poor mother is only too glad for us to give her her bite and sup. I will pay her a shilling or two, and she will work like the women work in my country, and not grumble. She is fat, she is strong—a little

pony. A soft word and a bit of sugar will carry her far."

Corinne's feet ached at nights to an intensity of pain, and having to stay in the close room where lemonades and ginger-ales had to be served without ceasing was paling the rose on her cheek, and taking the brightness from her eye; but she said no more, and made the best of things as they were. A sea-bath was her means of recuperation when the day had taken too much out of her. To slip away down to the shore when others were turning into bed, and let the waves fling her about as they would, was her chief pleasure, and kept her in health. Sebastien, once so careful that she should not overwork herself, now seemed never satisfied unless she was continually on the move. But she did not feel aggrieved at this change in him; she put it down to the increasing infirmities of age, which spoil both the temper and the digestion. She knew how he inwardly grieved over the loss of his son, and was at all times very gentle with him. With all her own heart she craved for the companionship, love, and protection of a brother, and often wept in secret over the loss of Antoine; but her nature was bright with the hopefulness of youth, and the poetry in her soul found vent in the constant repetition of the beautiful litanies of her Church. Antoine was an angel; perhaps he would guard her better so.

Old Sebastien laid no claims to being at all religious, but in his mellowed moods he had talked of

days when he had been an altar-boy in France, and had said, not without emotion, that whenever he thought of his mother he saw her always in the same position—kneeling before a large crucifix hanging on her bedroom wall. When much agitated, the old man prayed aloud in French; but, alas! when he was enraged he also cursed in French, speaking so rapidly, however, that it was impossible for any but his own countrymen to understand a single word he said—which was very fortunate, for him as for his hearer! He liked his daughter to be devout—as what man does not, be he pagan or Christian? Still, the fact that Jim Barr was a Protestant did not seem to trouble him. Perhaps he thought, as so many thought in the good old times, that it rested with the wife what the husband was.

On the other hand, when his daughter did meditate on the Sacrament of Matrimony, she always vowed to herself, as to God, that she would never marry any man who was not of her own faith, however much she might love him. This determination had not been implanted in her mind by anything she had heard or even read. She simply drew the logical conclusion from the practice of her religion that there could not be complete happiness where there was not unanimity in everything. She did not know any young men who were Catholics, and she often wondered how they acted, as compared with women, in regard to their religious duties. Sebastien had told her there were many bad men in the world—"swine, serpents, that the

good God keep from thee;" but her ideas as to the various degrees of wickedness such creatures were capable of were, of course, rather vague.

Laurence Hayes, a fairer, more effeminate type of man than his friend, Allingham, Corinne sometimes permitted to have a chat with her, and the exchange of ideas between the two was a pleasure to the girl, for she was quick to note that he was of an altogether superior class to the sort of people who were in the habit of patronising the Bluff. Occasionally he drew Allingham's name into the conversation, and she gathered that the latter, in his own world, was looked upon as being exceptionally talented and successful.

"I'm not without a decent stock of brains myself," Hayes said; "but when there's a stiff exam. on, I'm simply not 'in it' with Allingham. He carries all before him—and, worse luck, he does not need the kudos half as much as I and other poor beggars do. If I were in his shoes, I'd never be content to moon round Melbourne; I'd be 'off to Philadelphia in the morning!'"

He sang the conclusion of his sentence with a delightful baritone roll in his voice, which gave Corinne the impression that he was more musical than he had pretended to be.

"Of what are this clever gentleman's shoes made, Monsieur," asked the girl, mockingly, "that you would like to wear them? Pardon, but I'm curious!"

"Of gold, Mademoiselle; of gold," he answered, in the same manner. "But, like the pilgrims of old, he prefers to travel about with the hardest of peas inside them. You, therefore, must never know other than that he is 'bourgeois.' Remember that, and you will do me a great favour, Mademoiselle."

He looked round hastily, as if afraid that he had been betrayed into saying too much.

"It matters not to me what your friend is," Corinne retorted, with spirit. "It shall not grieve me very much when the time comes for him to go." And a flush crimsoned her soft cheeks. She looked down demurely, that her long, silken lashes might hide the expression in her bright eyes.

"No?" questioned Hayes, moving restlessly. "You are cruel, Mademoiselle Corinne, for my friend is much interested in you."

"It is kind, very kind," murmured the girl; "but it cannot make any difference to me."

"It might—it could!" said Hayes earnestly, and lowering his voice. "I do not want to give him away, but he is greatly attracted by you. He wants to know you; he wishes you to let him talk to you; he could interest you, be a true friend to you. Why are you so cold to him? You don't mind my speaking to you, though I can't hold a candle to him in looks, or brains, or anything else."

Corinne laughed softly and exasperatingly.

"You are kind, Monsieur—so plain of speech, so kind of heart. Your friend is like the sea when one has crossed its bar."

"Deep? Allingham deep? I swear I have never heard anyone say that of him before!" He fell to musing, as if the inference drawn from the girl's words was worth thinking over.

Like the sea the young girl had likened Hugh to, however, he was not to leave Corral's Bluff without proving that he had fascination. Against her will, the reserve of Corinne was gradually broken down by him—how she could not tell. He seemed to be making one last, strong effort to draw her spirit closer to his. She felt the magnetism, and tried hard to resist it, but in the end was completely conquered. And, once the barrier was down, rapid progress was made in their friendship—so rapid that Hayes was dumb-founded, and often whistled softly to himself in rueful amazement. For he was not above enjoying "a harmless flirtation" with Corinne himself. He liked her exceedingly well. Besides, though he would not confess to the feeling, he was "not too sure" of Allingham where his feelings were concerned. He might not be too honourable where women not of his own station in life were thrown in his path. Yet it would not be safe to remonstrate with him without good cause. Allingham never tolerated interference, and, in his own way, he had treated Hayes "like a Briton." Laurence

was longing to return to the city; all he could do was to keep urging his friend to return.

"A nice kettle of fish it'll be if the poor girl falls in love with him, after all! Hang it all, I feel inclined to turn Socialist, if it were only for the due apportioning of good looks! Who could resist a Greek profile like Hugh's? I wish he'd have kept his handsome nose in his books instead of filling in time here making love to a sailor's daughter. Let the old man catch him at it, that's all! I wouldn't stir up a foreigner's blood for the best woman living."

CHAPTER II.

THE WARNING OF THE SEA.

There came a day when "out on the rocks, when the tide was low," Corinne Courboules listened, with glad heart-throbs, to Hugh Allingham's passionate avowal of a passionate love.

He looked very handsome and manly as he knelt before her where she sat in a wave-worn hollow of the rocks. She felt every objection that she had previously gathered together melting before the persuasive flow of his caressing voice—a voice now whose every tone was sweet music to her ears. She trembled as she listened, half afraid of the power exercised over her, for he was not only telling her of his love, but of his desire that if she, too, loved him as he hoped and craved, their engagement should be a secret one, for reasons which he was unable to give her then.

"I tell you this, my darling, before you give me an answer to the question that is tormenting me night and day, because I want you to understand that I have no intention of deceiving you. My destiny is in your hands. I swear that if you send me

away from you, I shall go to lands where the face of woman is never seen. My love for you has taken such possession of me that life without your love means misery unutterable! From the first moment I saw you my soul whispered, 'She is here, the one woman in the world for you;' when I spoke with you, your own voice supplied whatever answer my heart still asked—till now, now, Corinne, oh dearest, oh beloved woman in all the world! I cannot rest any longer till I know from your own sweet lips whether my love is returned. Have you no word for me, darling, darling?"

Through all the magic enslaving her heart in that beloved voice, Corinne's healthy young brain kept pitilessly clear. She heard other voices bidding her be cautious, be slow to surrender to the tempestuous tide. "Why should he desire a secret engagement? Secrecy can never be right. I am my father's only daughter; must I withhold the news of my great happiness from him?"

These and other questions lent more diffidence to her already diffident and modest demeanour, but her gentle maidenliness only made her lover the more ardent in his protestations of undying love and fealty.

"My little girl, do not be so cold to me! I cannot bear this silence, this hesitation! Ah, if you only knew how I am suffering, you would have some pity for me!"

He seized her hands, he looked deep, deep into her beautiful, dark-blue eyes—dear eyes that could not hide the joyful tumult of the heart beneath!—and his own, brown as a mountain-pool, filled with tender, glowing light, held hers and drew them irresistibly, surely, till cheek touched cheek, and the battle was over, Corinne's heart a captive, while her brain still fought to the last, as many a woman's does, in vain, in vain!

"My sweet one! My heart's love!"

"Oh, the tender beauty of it all!" thought Corinne. This, then, was love!—the love she had read of, had dreamed of so often by this very shore! Surely the sea that had been her constant companion was also a sharer in her joy?

She lifted her head from her lover's breast to look at its expanse. It was sullen and grey, and overhead the clouds had darkened. There was a mournful note in the seagull's cry. The air grew colder.

"There is a storm brewing, my dearest," Allingham said, answering, as he thought, the girl's disappointed glance.

"I do not fear storms," she said, with a smile, "but"—wistfully—"I love the dear old sea so much, I was hoping it was of one mood with me to-day. But, see, it has sulky lips!"

"It is jealous," he whispered, kissing the soft masses of gold-brown hair that his embrace had loosened. "It knows perfectly well that you belong

to it no longer! You are mine—ever and only mine!”

“No,” she whispered back again, “part of me must still belong to the grand old sea! It is intermingled with my very being. I love it so, I could”—dreamily she spoke—“even lie down in the very heart of it, and so sleep for ever.”

Allingham's face whitened. He gazed at the girl in surprised dismay.

“Corinne,” he said sharply, “you must not speak like that! It is not fair to me—to our great love.”

Scared at his tone—so new to her—Corinne drew a little away from him.

“I meant no harm, indeed, dear Hugh”—she blushed prettily as she pronounced his name—“I hardly thought of what I was saying. It”—laughingly—“seemed to come from me—the words, I mean.”

“All the worse,” he responded lightly, though there was still a slight frown on his brow. “I hope you will never have any reason to want to make a bed of it.”

“It's you who are jealous!” the girl cried playfully. “You don't understand us yet—the sea and me. Oh, no, you don't!” Then, with a sudden change of tone and a half-sob, she added, “Oh, when you are gone, Hugh, only for it, how miserable, how lonely I will be!”

"My darling, I would never leave you if I could help it! You know that. I have delayed my return to town till my career stands every chance of being ruined. Hayes can hardly bring himself to speak civilly to me, poor beggar! He is tired of your sea long ago! It has lost its first charm for him. We must go up the day after to-morrow; there is no help for it, dear one."

"I know, I know! I do not want to be selfish, Hugh, nor to spoil your career. You will write to me often, often, won't you, darling? You know I shall live on your letters."

"I shall write as often as I dare—yes, dare, Corinne—because, in a small place like this, for you to receive letters daily would mean a great amount of unpleasant gossip. You see that, I am sure?"

"Oh, yes," said Corinne, colouring consciously. "The Barrs see every letter that goes through."

"And Mr. James Barr, junior, naturally would be quick to notice that the same masculine handwriting formed the letters of Miss Courboules' pretty name! The impudence of that country boor to presume to pay you his undesired and undesirable attentions! It irritates me almost beyond endurance to see him hanging about the place, and your father treating him as if the blood that runs in his sluggish veins was the bluest of the blue!"

"It is 'true blue' enough, I think, Hugh," Corinne said reproachfully. "Father says he is a very good young man."

"‘A good young man!’" Allingham echoed scornfully. "For goodness' sake, dearest, don't use Bible-class expressions like that! Positively, it sent a shiver down my spine."

Corinne's face clouded. Did other things she said send "a shiver down his spine"? She must study in his absence, she must work hard, so that when he came for her he would have no reason to be ashamed of his wife. After all, it was a relief not to have to go among all his grand friends just yet! Aloud she said: "Bible-class! What's that?"

Allingham looked desperately confused at the simple question.

"Oh, just a gathering of people who are fond of studying the Bible. It is waste of time, though, darling, to be talking of other people when we have so little time left for ourselves!"

"There are so many questions I must ask, Hugh—some day," she added hastily, quick to notice the impatient displeasure in his eyes. "None of them matter much to-day. You don't know how glad I was a fortnight ago when I asked you if you were a Catholic, and you said 'Yes'! It made everything right, somehow."

Allingham rose abruptly, his face turned from the girl as he assisted her to rise with elaborate care.

"Of course it would, of course it would! See, your beloved ocean is still wildly jealous! I hope it's in a better humour when we come to-morrow.

Dearest, it will have to be evening, next time! You must manage to slip away without anyone noticing you—even Hayes. Let your father think you've gone to bed." With a swift movement he drew the girl into his arms, and held her closely to his heart. "It will be our farewell, darling! How shall I face the grey days afterwards?"

Corinne never noticed that he did not question how she was to "face the grey days afterwards." Women rarely do take these little mental notes—fortunately for the men.

The lovers returned to the house by different paths—sadly symbolical of the future before them. And the sea moaned while the heart of Corinne sang on in her breast.

That evening, as Hugh Allingham and Laurence Hayes were retiring, the latter, after a preliminary straightening of the shoulders or two, suddenly said, "I say, Hugh, old man, you've been going the pace a bit with pretty Miss Corinne, haven't you? Do you—er—think it wise to disturb the peaceful tenor of her rustic ways?"

"Confound you, what do you mean?" and Allingham threw down his boots noisily, sufficient warning of a gathering storm. "I hope I can have a yarn to an interesting woman who happens to be good-looking, without your interference!"

"I don't call it interference to remind a pal that a girl has a heart. I—er—thought you might have forgotten."

"I don't want any of your—reminders! I'll be obliged if you keep Miss Courboules' name out of our conversations for the future."

Hayes heaved a sigh of relief. That looked satisfactory, anyway, he thought.

"All right, old chap! Must say, though, she's a grand girl, worthy of every respect, and all that."

"Smitten there yourself, Larry? Come, confess! I'll keep your secret."

"There's nothing secretive about me," Hayes said, not knowing how hard he was hitting. "Say, Hugh," lowering his voice nearly to inaudibleness, "I wish you had come here under your right name."

"Don't be an ass! It's my own name, isn't it? It's a relief to drop one of the trio, and it harms no one. Our holiday is over, so what odds?"

"It makes mystery, and——"

"Mystery be bothered! One would think you were talking of a tuppenny hot-pie!"

"There are pies, and pies," Larry said enigmatically, as he thumped his pillow into the shape preferred. "And"—to himself—"I wish I had put my finger into yours in the beginning! I don't like the look of things at all."

Silence in the room for a considerable time. One man murmured a few prayers, for he had not yet forgotten the teachings at a mother's knee. The

other planned and schemed, and schemed and planned. Both lay awake long.

Once, Larry's head popped up from the bed-clothes.

"Say, what became of that Miss Isabel Who's-This we met at the Dacres' ball?"

"How the dickens should I know? For Heaven's sake, go to sleep!"

But "Isabel" had found her place in Larry's memory before he slept.

When Corinne went to her room for the night, she first reverently knelt down in front of the little altar she had long ago made in a corner by the bedside. A statue of Our Lady, "Star of the Sea," stood upon it, and at each side were tiny vases of fresh flowers, and two tapers burning in the little bronze candlesticks that had been Antoine's last birthday present to her. She thought of her little brother as she prayed for guidance, and, with tears in her eyes, she asked that he might be permitted to guard her and to warn her in time of peril. Oh! what would she not have given to be able to lay her head on her mother's breast and tell her all! It seemed as if it would have been even joy to be permitted to go to her father, and crave his sympathy with all the right of his only child. Would he have withheld it if she had? Something in her heart answered "No." He might be angry, but his anger would not last against her truth and straightforwardness.

Ah! there was the sting of it! She who had never in her life told her father an untruth, who had never deceived him even in the small, petty ways that are but venial sins—she was now obliged to stoop to a deceit that every instinct within her cried out against as wrong—as doubly wrong in the lonely position in which she and her father were placed in the world. Knowing her parent's quickness of temper in trivial things, she could imagine in some degree how terrible his wrath would be should he find out that she was acting a double part. She shuddered as she knelt.

Before she disrobed, she went to her window, and opened it wide—longing for the clean, salt breath of the sea to remind her of the happy hours of the afternoon. The storm had gathered and burst earlier in the evening; still the waves roared, and the winds moaned.

Not even a star greeted her straining gaze. Sadness seemed to brood over the waters; the wind wailed but of tragedy. There was no glad message for her from the sea she loved. Rather did its voice sound as if it expostulated with her heart and prophesied disaster.

Sighing, she closed the lattice. "Holy Mother, send me pleasant dreams! For, to-morrow night, I can but weep and know no rest. Heart of Mary Immaculate, prove thyself a mother to me!"

She slept, and smiled in sleeping, for

“So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried angels lacquey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in clear dream, and solemn vision,
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear.”

CHAPTER III.

POWDER AND PAINT AND THE SHEEN
OF GEMS.

"The daffodil scheme is the best, Isabel. The ballroom could suggest spring; green and gold look lovely, I think. And you can well afford to wear daffodil-yellow; it will suit you to perfection. There will be room for plenty of flirtation corners—I'll see to them. We'll send the invitations out straight-away. Thank goodness! that handsome Hugh Lowenthal's back in town—'stewing hard,' Cliff says, though why he should be such a fool to do it, with all his prospects, is a mystery to me."

"Likes to show he has brains, I suppose."

"What does the heir to a baronetcy want with brains? He ought to be looking out for a good-looking wife to grace the position—someone who would do him credit socially. That proud old mother of his will be hard to please when he does fix upon a suitable 'parti.' Detestable woman! I can't stand her!"

"She'll have to be invited, all the same. Put her name down, too. I don't mind how much 'frill'

she puts on; I rather like to see her stately impudence among a mixed crowd. That's the worst of Melbourne. One has to hobnob with people one wouldn't look at in London! Oh! do leave those Carter girls out!—common creatures, always dressed up to the height of absurdity. Whatever put it into your head to ask them?"

"My dear Isabel, it's a good thing my head is usually here to assist yours! How can I leave the Carter girls out of it when Pa has borrowed so much from old Carter? When you marry money, you can afford to be particular!"

"I forgot. Yes, I mean to marry money, as you term it; but I'll not marry money and vulgarity combined, if I can help it."

Isabel Lascelles put down the list she had been conning, and arose gracefully from the very comfortable chair she had been seated in. She was tall, with a figure that spoke of Sandow exercises—she had a horror of growing fat. She was considered a beauty, though her features were not perfect. Her complexion owed much to artificial aid, but, as she was an adept at secrets of the toilet-table, no one could successfully point out where nature ended and art began. Her hair was black, her eyes green in some lights, grey in others, but full and bright, though rather too close together for the favourable verdict of a physiognomist. Her head was small and daintily-shaped, and she carried it well.

"Miss Lascelles always looks so aristocratic," her acquaintances were in the habit of saying; "there is such an air of 'thus far, and no farther,' about her. We shouldn't wonder if she managed to secure a coronet for herself, with her opportunities; the Lascelles have high-born connections at home, and that is the reason everybody that's anything turns up at their place sooner or later."

My Lady Isabel was quite aware how well she was equipped for the fray of obtaining an enviable establishment through marriage. She had never neglected any of her natural gifts, and she had acquired what Nature had denied, by determined and persevering study and cultivation. Even her voice was a perfect example of what could be done for that organ by careful training. In the beginning harsh and unmusical, it was now soft, sweet, and refined; she spoke her English perfectly, and her French met with the approval of the French themselves—which is the highest that can be said of it in the way of praise. Massaging, manicuring, hairdressing establishments of the best reputation in the city, all knew Miss Isabel Lascelles. All had a hand in her perfectly-groomed appearance. Cyrus Lascelles, her father, often wondered "how she did it," for he supplied his children with as small an amount of pocket-money as he possibly could; he was always in the toils of the money-lenders. Mrs. Lascelles insisted on entertaining on a lavish scale to "marry off" her daughters. Two had been settled in life owing to her exertions, and now there was only Isabel to "do

her duty by"—difficult Isabel, who looked even higher than her matchmaking mamma.

Mrs. Lascelles was a popular woman; she had plenty of worldly tact, and had, many a time, done her husband good service by "getting round" an importunate creditor. Poor Lascelles was a man of the heavy sort; he saw too little before him, and was lacking in the saving sense of humour, which might have helped him in the tiding over of cares and troubles. He took every reverse to heart, and, being a man who disliked herding with the many, spent a dull and wearisome existence in his own home, resounding with life and gaiety though it usually was. Mrs. Lascelles ruled the household; he paid the bills—when he could and how he could. It was not he who traded on the names of his high-born and wealthy relatives in England, but Mrs. Lascelles; she found them a great "stand-by" when other things failed. And Isabel was always "going 'home' to be presented by the dear Countess next season."

Hugh Lowenthal was the son of Mr. Lascelles' most-valued friend. He and Hubert Lowenthal had been at Cambridge together, and when the latter had, in later years, come out to Australia, too, the old friendship was renewed, and fanned to comfortable warmth for herself by Mrs. Lascelles. Hubert Lowenthal was next of kin to the Earl of Poppledene, who had no issue, but he was now in failing health, and the earldom was likely to fall to

Hugh, his only son—Hugh Allingham Lowenthal. Mrs. Lowenthal, of whom Isabel's sister, Mrs. Lennox, had spoken with such disfavour, was a cold and stately dame of the old school. Stiff black silks, rich black velvets, seemed part of her personality, and one never dreamed of seeing anything but real gems around her long, thin neck and upon her marble bosom. She worshipped the conventionalities; rumour whispered that, consequently, her son hated them. Her chief ambition was that Hugh should marry "a lady of irreproachable birth and noble antecedents." (Poor Corinne!)

The ball given by the Lascelles was, as the society papers expressed it, "a flattering and brilliant success. The brightest constellations of the aristocratic world lent it splendour of even a realistic kind, for many magnificent jewels were worn by the titled ladies present."

There were, truth to tell, but a very few "titled" ladies in the assemblage; but the few that were there had, of course, to be made the most of, and Mrs. Lascelles was always politic enough to keep a few lady reporters among her acquaintances. "The Countess," as Isabel had nicknamed Mrs. Lowenthal, displayed her really regal bearing to the best advantage, and no gentleman among the younger generation was more agreeable or debonair-looking than her son, Hugh. It would have been difficult to recognise in him that evening the Hugh Allingham, of somewhat dour aspect, of Corral's Bluff.

No duke newly appointed to a gubernatorial position could have been more suave in manner or of the "grand air."

Larry Hayes often looked across the room at him as he gracefully swayed in the dance with some lovely town-bred girl of his own station in life, and wondered what Corinne would have thought could she but have seen him in his own atmosphere.

Larry was only there through Hugh's kindly offices. To know people of social standing was part of the worldly advancement his friend desired for him. There were no "wallflowers," so he had no difficult or irksome duties to perform for his hostess. He could not have pointed out one decidedly plain or dowdy woman among the lot. Those who were not good-looking had doctored their "skins" so well, had called in so artfully the aid of belladonna for their eyes, and of the pencil for their eyebrows, had their scanty locks so carefully and cleverly added to by silky masses of somebody else's hairs, that they appeared to be charming princesses just taken out, "holus bolus," from an up-to-date fairy tale!

Isabel gave her sister, Mrs. Lennox, no cause to regret the daffodil-yellow. She held her own, among all, as a model of refined elegance and even beauty.

Hugh, though his inmost thoughts still enshrined Corinne as a pearl of loveliness from the world's ocean, admired Isabel Lascelles immensely. She

had held some indefinable sort of attraction for him ever since he had met her first—an attraction that was not in the least like that which Corinne exercised over him, but, nevertheless, was one which would always make her an object of interest in his eyes.

It is indifference that society belles find hard to cope with. Isabel was not accustomed to being treated in any other than a gallant manner by members of the opposite sex, and, consequently, always received the most marked attentions, provided they emanated from the "élite" quarter, with a most matter-of-fact air—as her special right, in a word.

Larry Hayes thought Miss Lascelles beautiful enough as she stood chatting animatedly to Hugh later on. She wore a shimmering gown, that fitted her well-proportioned figure perfectly, and yet, when she moved, gave the impression of floating sunset clouds of gold. Her dark hair was arranged so that curling tendrils fell around and softened and made girlish her face, which was now uplifted to Lowenthal's with a most alluring expression upon it. She had a jewelled butterfly among her shining tresses, but, at her breast, nothing but cloth-of-gold roses—glorious specimens of their kind, sent up that morning by "the Countess" herself. Hugh was gazing into her eyes with the look of tender admiration he could always call up at such affairs. Hayes moved restlessly and impatiently as he noticed his attitude.

"Poor Mademoiselle of the rocks," he muttered, "you stand 'Buckley's chance' of being remembered up here! Confound Lowenthal! What, in Heaven's name, made him act a double part at the Bluff! It wouldn't matter a hang if he hadn't got hold of the little girl's heart; but I'm jolly much afraid he has, somehow, and not bothered himself about the consequences. Where was he the night before we left, if not courting her in some nook or corner? He awoke me out of a jolly good sleep, coming in as late as he did, and next morning he looked a wreck; while the girl's face was as white as death when he said good-bye, and my farewell pleasantries, I could see, fell on deaf ears. Well, Mr. Hugh Allingham Lowenthal, if you give a further heartache to that grand little girl of the Bluff, you will have me to reckon with, that's all! I may be a bit of a fool, and I owe you many a good turn, but I'd be the last, for all that, to make havoc of a woman's life, particularly of one as fresh and unspoiled as hers. She, a Catholic, too!"

"What's the matter, Larry?" said a voice behind him a few moments after. "You look graver than the honourable judge now confabbing with Mr. Lascelles! Where has your wandering fancy sent you?"

Hayes looked him squarely in the eyes, whose merry light aggravated him for the first time in their comradeship.

"To Corral's Bluff," he answered. "For a moment I was listening to the pretty voice of Mademoiselle Corinne!"

The smile died out of Lowenthal's eyes in an instant.

"I knew you were badly hit," he said, striving to speak lightly; "but not so badly as this! — Lawrence Hayes, medical student, looking on at the most resplendent scene of 'fair women and brave men,' and comparing it and them with old Sebastien's ramshackle buildings, to the disadvantage——"

"Of the lot!" Hayes ended abruptly. "Between ourselves, Lowenthal, there isn't a woman here that old Sebastien's daughter is not the superior of—in beauty and sensibility, anyhow!"

"Though perhaps not in culture? You are right, Hayes. It is a pity that Fate chained her, like Andromeda, to the rocks, for she has plenty of brains, too. The pity of it is"—with a half-sigh, which was not lost on Larry—"it's too late now to start her on the high road to a secondary education! Probably she is happier as she is, and where she is."

"She'll never stay as she is, and where she is!" Hayes said prophetically. "The old man will not live for ever, and then—Mademoiselle's story will begin, and, perhaps, dramatically. Who knows?"

"It has begun," thought Lowenthal; "but how it's going to end is the problem!"

He felt a twinge of jealousy against Hayes as he sought out his next partner for the waltz just begin-

ning. Now, if he were but in Hayes' place, the coast would be perfectly clear for marriage with Corinne Courboules. There would be no one to say him nay; no stern old father to rouse up like an awakened lion—a truly John Bull lion! No mother to point, with the dignity of all the De Veres, to the long gallery of portraits adorning the corridors of Poppledene.

He could not deny that his blood bounded at the prospects that awaited him across the seas. He was no democrat, but he felt that he would gladly forfeit all, at times, since he had met the woman who had unconsciously stirred his heart to the wild throbbings of sweet first love.

He was not so much gratified as nettled by Larry's open admiration of Corinne. To hear him express it in words seemed like a familiarity, a desecration! Yet it would only lead to discovery of his present plans with regard to the young girl should Hayes be made a confidant of. No, he must "paddle his own canoe," and, above all, he must blind his own relatives to the passionate attachment he had foolishly formed for an obscure country girl, who might not even be acquainted with the smallest of the refinements his world exacted.

Second to an arranged visit to England, to take place when the result of his final examination as a physician was known, and there to take his degree, and find among either the moneyed or titled a wife who might be an ornament in the house of Popple-

dene, was, he knew, a union with Isabel Lascelles, as far as the wishes of both parents were concerned. To seek her in marriage would not entirely displease, for Mrs. Lowenthal had long recognised in her the qualities essential to social success.

"To entertain the King in a befitting manner would be an easy feat for Isabel Lascelles," she once had said in Hugh's hearing. "She is the only girl in Melbourne whose every movement shows in itself that she comes of a patrician stock."

To-night, Hugh thought her right. Corinne was beautiful, of course—beautiful and graceful, too; but she lacked the "grande dame" manner that was like murmuring melody to his conservative soul.

When Corinne spoke, the faint French accent, that lent an added charm to the sweetness of her tones, bewitched him, as did the rosy Cupid's bow of a mouth, which, opening, showed the even rows of "spotless pearls" within. Beside her, he could never be her critic! Away from her, here in this soft, perfumed, enervating air, he was aware of the defects, that were in no wise the fault of Corinne, but of circumstance. Well, it was no use worrying about the future. The girl of his heart loved him; he alone knew how well. Let coming days take care of themselves.

So he did his duty to the last, even "sitting out" a dance with the gratified Isabel in the conservatory, and paying compliments that sounded exceptionally ardent in her small pink ears, the while, in the splashing of the fountain, he heard the sea waves

lapping on the beach, and in the music of the band, as it sobbed a waltz, the tender pleading of Corinne as he had heard it last among the grim, grey rocks which guarded the shore of Corral's Bluff.

In his breast pocket was a letter that day received from her. She never wrote long letters; for she was afraid—poor, modest, humble-minded soul—that she might irritate his scholarly sense by making hideous grammatical mistakes. So far, no stern examiner sent forth from the Department of Education could find fault with the missives received by Lowenthal. The latter would have overlooked, maybe, a few errors in spelling for more passionate outbursts of feeling. Her letters tantalised him; they were so short—sweet and pure as a flower, but not human as was the woman. He had asked her to express herself carefully, in case of the letters falling through some accident into alien hands, and she had obeyed his injunctions almost too literally.

"I cannot wait till the season opens without seeing her again," he said to himself, when the ball was over, and he had assisted his mother to her carriage. "I shall run down for a few days shortly, and make some excuse to old Sebastien. Confound it, I can never look upon the surly old curmudgeon as Corinne's father!"

Hugh wrote long letters to Corinne—long letters full of passion and longing and poetical thoughts. Corinne "lived" upon them, as she had said she would. But, oh, the difficulty of getting them delivered into her own hand! It had been the

custom for anyone on their way from the little township to bring the mail to Courboules, and Sebastien would at once have grown suspicious if she told him she would like to call at the post-office herself. Besides, there was another way of looking at it. He might hug the false hope to himself that she was going there to chance a meeting with Jim Barr.

At first she had managed to be out on the road when she knew a neighbour was coming back from the general store, but she soon saw that that plan could not be kept up, for Sebastien's temper in winter time required that she should be within call in the daylight. In the end, she was obliged to bring herself to ask the man her lover so despised to bring her letters himself, and deliver them only when he found her alone. It was humiliating, but there was no other way. She did not tell Hugh—not then.

CHAPTER IV.

"I'LL BRAVE THE RAGING OF THE SKIES,
BUT NOT AN ANGRY FATHER."

The winter had never seemed so long, so intolerably dull. Sebastien's rheumatism laid stronger hold upon him than ever, and only for young Barr's company, which was freely given even in his most cantankerous moods, he would have made the gloomy days drearier still for his daughter.

Corinne and Jim were better friends now than they had ever been during the long period of their acquaintanceship—a compulsory friendship on Corinne's part at first, but ending in one firmly grounded on respect and gratitude. Jim was so good to her father that her heart would have been indeed an unfilial one did she not show some appreciation of his kindly services. His face had whitened under his tan when he had put into her hands the first letter in her absent lover's handwriting. She felt he knew instinctively that there was some tie between her and one of the summer "visitors," which one she trusted he would never guess,

As if aware that his own chance as a suitor was infinitesimal, he drew more into himself as the days went by, and never presumed upon her more genial manner towards him. If Hugh had not taken time by the forelock, and arrived at the Bluff a considerable length of time before the tourist season opened, the future might have turned out more happily for Corinne than it did. During the busy time Sebastien would have had enough to do to keep his attention going in another direction, and the same might be said of young Barr. As it turned out, however, the day Hugh Allingham (as he was still to the Courboules) suddenly arrived, there was not one visitor by "the sad sea waves" to divert interest from his actions.

The change in Corinne on his appearance also gave the situation away. A week before, the old man had commented on her pallor and languor, and wondered why the winter respite had not done more for her physically. Besides grieving over and regretting the necessity of secrecy, she had been studying hard at night, in her own untutored way, while Sebastien slept; and "burning the candle at both ends" did not agree with one who loved to commune with Nature among Nature's works. Swimming was still to her a keen pleasure, but she grew tired sooner than she had ever become before, for her heart was restless where once so tranquil, and the craving for her lover growing so strong that it seemed beyond bearing.

Ah, and when he did come to her on the wings of love, what a transformation! Roses again in the soft and lovely cheeks; eyes like stars; laughter silvery, sweet and frequent; smiles and dimples; quick, blithe movements. A man may be as old as Methuselah, and as surly as Cerberus, but he is never so blind that these signs can pass unnoticed.

Hugh Lowenthal, too glad to have the young girl all to himself—there was only Rosalie there—was less careful than prudence had enjoined, and did not keep the necessary guard over expression and tone when speaking to her that he should have done under the circumstances. He thought it sufficient that he had only “run down” for three or four days, and supposed that old Sebastien was content with his assurance that the coast scenery had an overmastering charm for him, “tied as he was to his books.”

But love has an unmistakable language; it needs not words, it does not even need actions. And Sebastien had been well acquainted with the tender passion in his own young days. He watched the two unsuspecting young people intently and grimly.

“If the young man wanted to marry his daughter—well, let him speak out.” He didn’t care much for him—he preferred Jim as a son-in-law—but, “if the girl was satisfied, he mightn’t stand out against it.” So he didn’t say anything to Corinne, one way or the other, but complacently waited, and wondered whether being a doctor in a city overrun with

medical men, as he had heard Melbourne was, was "a paying game."

There was another who watched as intently; one who had no faith whatever in gentlemanly summer visitors, who came and went without anyone knowing anything more about them than they chose to tell. Love, though it blinds the many, clears the vision of a few, and Jim guessed at once that this was the man who had won, or was winning, Corinne Courboules' heart. He studied him from a distance as he paid his usual visits to Sebastien, and the more he saw of "Mr. Allingham," the more uneasy he felt at the outcome of the stranger's ardent courtship—for so he looked upon it.

Barr's honest heart was sore enough with his own burden of unrequited love, but he could have borne its pangs if satisfied as to the prospect of happiness for the woman who filled his thoughts almost to the exclusion of aught else. It was not that he suspected Lowenthal of insincerity in his devotions to Corinne, but he thought he read worldly pride, a certain amount of selfishness, and a good deal of fickleness in the man's nature.

Hugh would have laughed to scorn the mere suggestion of Barr as a character reader; but Jim was secure in his own belief that no man could "take him down" when it came to summing up solid worth. He listened with interest to whatever remarks Sebastien passed upon the visitor, and made a mental note of his supposed occupation. He, too, was often "in town."

The weather, though cold, was fairly fine, and—one leaving the house always a half-hour before the other—the lovers had many an hour's happy converse together in the rocks. There, Corinne would tell of what she had been learning in Hugh's absence; and he, approving, would laughingly question and puzzle her, and kiss away the wrong answers which so often stumbled over her pretty lips. There they often stood, hand in hand, watching the tide go out or come in, but never once, as Corinne remarked with a sigh, was the smile of the sunshine upon the deep when they reached it in company.

"Never mind, we shall see it often in the glorious summer days, when I come again, dearest. It won't be long, Corinne, till I am with you once more; and, oh, how I shall manage to make that month stretch out! I suppose I'll have to bring Hayes with me; those wretched tourist people will have possession of you. You don't dislike Larry, do you?"

"Oh, no! On the contrary, I like him very much. I wouldn't care to see a stranger with you, at all. But, Hugh, darling, suppose—suppose father wouldn't have you both as boarders again? What shall we do then?"

"Oh, yes, he will! He gave me a good hint this morning, though, that my next visit was only permitted as a compliment; politely enough, don't fear."

"Hugh, dear Hugh, if only you would take him into your confidence! He wouldn't betray you, even

for my sake. You don't understand father's nature; it may be rugged, but it is as strong and grand as his own dear cliffs of France."

"What you ask is impossible at present, dear one. We have threshed out this subject before. I dislike secrecy as much as you do, sweetheart; believe that. I simply can't see my way now to make our engagement public. Corinne"—as if a sudden thought had struck him—"you wouldn't object to a secret marriage, would you, darling?"

His tones grew softer and more caressing, and his hand fondled her cheek as he spoke.

For a moment the girl did not answer. There was no sound but the murmur of the restless waves; the air was very still.

Hugh Lowenthal did not bend to look into Corinne's eyes, as was his usual custom when he asked a serious question of her. He felt her form trembling while he waited impatiently for her answer. He was of the exacting type that craves continually for some fresh proof of love from the being beloved.

When Corinne answered, her words sounded faint and far off, though she pressed his hand closer still against her face.

"I—I wouldn't mind so much if we got ready for it in the right way, Hugh, dearest."

"In the right way? Whatever do you mean, girlie mine?"

"By going to Confession and Holy Communion beforehand," she half-whispered. "Where the church would be wouldn't matter, as long as it was our own church, I know!"

Could Corinne have seen her lover's face as he heard her words, the whole current of her life might have run in an entirely different direction; but, as they were both leaning against a boulder of rock, and his foothold was on a jutting piece of stone above hers, she could not, without moving from him.

"Supposing it were easier, as it certainly would be safer, for us to be married by the first Protestant minister to hand, wouldn't that satisfy you till we could go through the ceremony again in a Catholic church?" he questioned.

"Oh, Hugh! You can't be in earnest! You're only teasing me, you bad boy! Why, of course it wouldn't. You wouldn't dream of doing such a thing, any more than I would!"

She tried to turn to look up at him, but he held her firmly in place.

"Don't get so excited, little woman! In the eyes of the law we would be man and wife just the same. Don't you know that?"

"The law of the Church is my law first; and yours also, is it not, dear? We are children of the Church from birth to death. I am not learned, but I know that much of my—of our—religion, darling. Even if you were a Protestant, my answer should be the same. We could not be truly happy if we did the

wrong thing first, and the right thing afterwards. And, oh, Hugh, dear, it may be silly of me"—she bent her head low and blushed—"but I have learned from my missal—my own dear, dead mother's gift—every word off by heart of that holy and beautiful marriage service; and often it keeps singing, singing, like an angel's chorus in my heart."

The man's hand was trembling now.

"You are far too good for me," he said hoarsely. "No angels sing in my heart! But, as you say, I was only teasing you, sweetheart. There is no immediate chance of our marriage yet, unfortunately; and, if there were, you must not set me up on too high a pedestal, or exact too much from me. I am very human, Corinne, and only a man; neither better nor worse than my fellow-men."

"But," in a surprised tone, "you don't need to be perfect to do what the Church teaches. I have such a lot to learn about religious customs yet; but, of course, you are well up in them, and it all comes easy to you."

"Very easy," he said ironically; but the irony was lost upon Corinne, who was just then inwardly contemplating her own small "iniquities."

Then he took a small volume out of his pocket and gave it to her.

"Since your memory is so good, little one, you can learn 'off by heart' some of these love poems in my absence, and repeat them to me sometimes on my

return. I long to hear such words as are in these upon your lips. I am a greedy soul, I'm afraid! Here is one that I shall repeat for you and to you. Listen well, Mademoiselle Corinne, for the sentiments are mine, dear heart, though the lines are not:—

“ ‘Ask me not how much I love thee,
Do not question why;
I have told thee the tale,
In the evening pale,
With a tear and a sigh.

“ ‘I told thee when love was hopeless,
But now he is wild, and sings
That the stars above shine ever of love,
Though they frown on the fate of kings.

“ ‘Oh, a king would have loved and left thee,
And away thy sweet love cast;
But I am thine
Whilst the stars shall shine—
To the last, to the last!’”

Corinne listened, and all vague fears died away. Surely life had nothing sweeter than this tender lover's love.

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Hugh Lowenthal returned to Melbourne less satisfied with himself than usual. He knew he had made a foolish move in the first place by posing as a Catholic when anxious to win the friendship of Corinne. To tell her the truth now would, in dead earnest, take him off his “pedestal”; and, besides, might she not get hold of some “ridiculous Popish idea” which would bring their little romance to a sudden close? He could not give her up; he would

not give her up. "Oh my first, oh my best, I could not choose but love thee!" he murmured to himself. After all, it was not her religion that was the barrier between them, but "the cursed social distinctions" that were an article of faith with his family.

He fancied that the manner of his friend Hayes was not as heartily genial on his return, but put it down to "good old Larry being out of sorts." He had some difficulty, when the warm weather set in, to persuade Hayes to again accompany him to Corral's Bluff for vacation. However, he prevailed in the end, and the two duly arrived and were installed in old Sebastien's home as weekly boarders.

It was during this time that small events led the way to more tragical ones. Wrapped in each other more and more with every day, and oblivious of the fact that other people were neither blind nor deaf, Hugh and Corinne, before a fortnight was well over, were looked upon as an engaged couple—"or ought to be if they weren't," as one gossip remarked to another—and Sebastien was often openly asked "when the wedding was to come off."

The old man was waiting patiently for the all-important question of his consent and blessing to be asked, and a few weeks glided by uneventfully enough till, one evening, an old "visitor," privileged on account of the number of seasons he had patronised the Bluff, was having "a good-night cap" with Sebastien, and, after commenting on the number the season had brought to this favourite resort, said con-

fidentially, "Do you think it wise to have such an all-round toff as that handsome, dark fellow flirting with your daughter?"

"Flirting with my daughter!" Sebastien spluttered; "my daughter?"

If he had been an emperor, he could not have drawn himself more erect, aged as he was.

But garrulous Josiah Evans was never quick to see when he was blundering.

"Why, yes," he said. "No offence, but I've seen that same fellow often in Collins-street with Lord This and Lady That. I'd know him anywhere. For all you can tell, he may be up to no good. And how's the girl to know? I'd take my young noble to task pretty quick, if I were you."

Sebastien brooded over these words for days.

At last, calling Corinne, he questioned her closely, pretending he was anxious to know whether it was through any rebuff of hers that young James Barr was of late ceasing to visit him as frequently as of old.

"It seems to me, thy father, that thou dost not know a good man from a bad. Pah! It only needs a black-eyed stranger from the city to come and look at thee, and thou hast more than enough to say! I tell thee thou art no daughter of mine, if thou givest fools reason to talk of thee. By St. Denis, but I'll teach thy handsome friend a bitter lesson if he forget the respect due to thy mother's daughter!"

"Oh, father! Indeed, dear father, there is no reason for you to talk like this," began Corinne, her face flushing and paling.

"There is, were thy ears as quick to hear as mine are. Have a care lest thou art fooled, as wiser women have been fooled before thee!"

Corinne slipped away, frightened and confused, her eyes opened at last. For the rest of the time Lowenthal was at the Bluff—and she herself asked him to shorten the time—she was her old cautious self again—self-scornful at the humiliating position she was forced to take up; afraid, too, not for herself, but her lover. Hayes inwardly rejoiced that the length of their stay was drawing to a close. He had only come because of a sense of chivalrous responsibility towards Corinne; and he noticed the peculiarity that was beginning to creep into old Sebastien's manner towards his friend. It gave him an uncanny feeling to see the old fellow's red-lidded eyes fixed on Lowenthal with an inscrutable expression in their cavernous depths, half-hid by thick, shaggy eyebrows.

As for poor Sebastien, he was to be pitied. A great fear was lying heavily on his heart. After the manner of those who have all their lives long placed little faith in others' vows, especially where young blood was concerned, he was beginning to suspect his own daughter, and put the worst construction on what he could see with his own eyes was the understanding that existed between her and Lowenthal. The thought that the only child left to his

old age was wilfully deceiving him, and bringing disgrace upon him, lent again to the smouldering volcano of his Gallic temperament something of its old fire. When a man of Sebastien's age gets an idea firmly rooted into his brain, no earthly power can drive it out. There was danger ahead for someone.

For a few days before Lowenthal's departure, the old man drank heavily, and Corinne, at her wits' end at such a new phase of her father's character, and shamed to her heart's core at the thought that he might make an exhibition of himself before Hugh, sent an urgent message to Jim Barr to come and help her father to "pull up" before it became common talk that he was a drunkard.

Jim came at once.

"I won't leave him till he's all right again," he said reassuringly. "Something must have upset him. I never saw him in this state before."

To Corinne's grateful thanks for his promptitude in hastening to her assistance Barr appeared to turn a deaf ear. He took Sebastien in hand in the old kindly way, and the girl breathed freely again. Duplicity was getting on her nerves, but when Hugh had gone, perhaps all would go on calmly as before.

The last day of Lowenthal's holiday proved her busiest for the season. Rosalie was tired out, and could not drag her little feet round as she had done at the beginning, and Corinne was obliged to do double duty.

Try as they would, the lovers could not get five minutes' conversation together. Their only hope of farewell words lay in their meeting after closing time at the old trysting-place, the Sword Rock.

Sebastien, seemingly a little better, though he had been moody and irritable all day, went to "lie down" at dusk, which often meant a heavy sleep for hours, and Barr took over the "soft drinks" counter, usually patronised till the last minute.

Lowenthal slipped away from Hayes at the first opportunity afterwards, and all Corinne was left to do was to watch for a favourable moment when she could steal off unobserved and join him.

The moment came, and, throwing a light shawl round her head, she made her way carefully along a narrow path above the steeper and less-frequented cliffs—a path her own feet had formed in her goings to and fro through the years. So used was she to the way that she could have gone straight to the craggy recess where Hugh awaited her had she been blindfolded. The night was dark enough as it was, and she couldn't see any distance before her.

Suddenly a hand gripped her arm, and—his white beard blown about by the wind—her father confronted her.

She smothered a scream, for his eyes were glowing red in the dim light, and, for the first time in her life, fear of him as regarded herself was taking possession of her.

She tried to speak, to shake off his hand, which was hurting her cruelly, but his grasp was strong

with the strength of frenzy. He was talking thickly, gutturally, and—oh, horror! striving to put her backwards over the cliffs into the seething depths of sea below.

Her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, but she strove with all her grand young strength to save herself; while the old man, with the stronger strength of one possessed for a time of a maniacal demon, drove her every second nearer to a terrible death on the water-hidden, sharp-edged shelves beneath, muttering the while in his native tongue: "Thou shalt have a long swim to-night, my daughter, and the sea shall wash thy soul clean!"

As she stood on the brink of eternity, in a flash Corinne understood all that was working in the poor old man's mind, and she almost felt as if she were being hurled to a righteous doom. Then her senses swam, and she was falling, falling——

When she came to her senses, the cold wind was still blowing on her face, but her head was resting against a strong arm, and someone was forcing her to swallow spirits from a flask.

"There, there; you are alright now, Miss Corinne," Laurence Hayes' deep voice was saying. "No one need know but me, and your father's mad act has already spent itself. He wasn't responsible for his action. He's over there, opposite you, weeping like a child. Don't worry. He'll be all right. I'll give him a soothing draught to-night. Lucky I brought my 'tools' with me. They're not packed yet."

"Hugh—Hugh—down there!" gasped Corinne, her next thought for her lover.

"He'll be all right," said Larry, somewhat contemptuously. "He can cool his heels there, for all I care just now. There, now, try to rise with my help. Good girl! Just caught you in time. After Hugh sneaked off—I guessed where he was going, of course; it's no use pretending I didn't—I thought I'd go out into the fresh air and have a smoke; 'Lucy Hinton' isn't a bad companion when you're left in the lurch. Well, I just happened to be in your tracks—accidentally of course—the night was so dark and all that, and, to make a long story short, I just arrived in the nick of time to pull you back. Yes, cry, there's a good girl! A real out-and-out weep will do you more good than all my drugs."

Corinne wept on unrestrainedly against the arm which had saved her—wept not only because of natural reaction, but with shame and bitter repentance, that she had ever consented to act a lie to please anyone, however loved. Oh, how sordid it all seemed now! It was as if someone had come and stripped off a rose-hued mantle from a marble figure and revealed, not beauty, but distorted ugliness.

And perhaps Laurence Hayes felt something of what was passing in the girl's mind, for he soothed her with tender, brotherly words, as if she had been a child.

"You'll come back to the house with me; and, I say, Mademoiselle, 'make up' with the poor old dad,

who'll be sorry enough when he's sobered again. And don't live two lives, even for that jolly blind ass of a Hugh! I know how fond he is of you, but you won't make him any the truer to you by giving in to him. You do what you think is right. You're a Catholic, you know, and that means 'noblesse oblige' to us who have the good luck to be of the grand old faith."

"But Hugh—Mr. Allingham—is one, too," faltered the girl.

"Hugh one! By the powers, he's not! He comes of as bigoted a stock as—— Oh, but it's treason I'm talking, entirely. He'll be knocking the head off me for it. It is enough to say that he is not a Catholic—worse luck."

Corinne tottered again, and would have fallen had not Larry put his arm around her and steadied her. In a few minutes, however, she got some control over herself.

"My father," she said, motioning to Hayes to lead her to where he still sat, moaning in French to himself.

Laurence struck a match and showed the old man his daughter. She sank at her father's feet and knelt there. She took his shaking hand and kissed it.

"Father, I have done no wrong. God is my witness. Do you understand? Tell me you understand."

"Mon enfant! Mon enfant!"

Larry gently led father and daughter home.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHOALS OF CIRCUMSTANCE.

Father Dalton, the hard-worked parish priest of Port C——, was in the middle of his dinner, consisting of a scraggy neck of mutton, potatoes, a half-cooked bit of cabbage, and some boiled rice, when his housekeeper told him that a young lady had called to see him. "An' she that tired, poor thing, having walked all the way from the Bluff, that she could hardly keep her feet under her."

"All the way from the Bluff! Bless my soul, the poor girl must be starving, too. What name did she give you, Anne? Miss Courboules? Oh, ay! from the refreshment rooms down there."

He finished hurriedly, and went out to Corinne.

"Well, now, Miss Courboules, who'd have thought of your coming such a long way on foot? I hope there's nothing wrong with your father?"

"No, Father Dalton, thank you. I was just very much troubled in mind over something, and I felt I must come and get your advice, if I had to walk twenty miles more to get it."

"Very good, my child. I'll do the best I can for you. Go into the dining-room there, and Anne will make you a fresh cup of tea and give you something to eat. I'll not listen to a word till you're rested."

Corinne was only too thankful to partake of the simple repast. She was tired out after her long and wearisome jaunt, though to be physically weary gave her a sort of satisfaction, after the mental travail she had been undergoing. She had refused to give more than a few minutes' interview to Hugh Lowenthal the following morning; she had said she could not bear more; and he, enraged and disappointed, but in full possession of himself as usual, had listened to her brief explanation of the occurrence of the night before, had assured her again of his undying attachment, had promised to write with his usual regularity, and bidden her a fond farewell—wilfully blind to the fact that he was still acting an unmanly part. Hayes had scourged him well with his tongue on his return, puzzled and annoyed, from the Sword Rock, and he had taken "the dressing down" quietly, knowing in his heart that he deserved it, saying in justification that he loved the girl, but was not yet prepared to take her into the presence of his relations, because of the "jolly row the pater would make over such a mesalliance."

Hayes quoted Tennyson at him; that "true hearts were more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood," but drew nothing more from him than a muttered imprecation.

Corinne told the kindly priest the whole story. He listened attentively, and told her that, if she wished it, he would call upon the young man on his next visit to Melbourne, which would be in less than a month's time.

"But, Father, I have not his full address, even if I could avail myself of your kind offer. He calls for my letters, you see."

"Ah, that's a bad sign; a very bad sign! For all you know, my child, he may be a married man."

Corinne grew deathly white.

"My poor child, a young girl can never be too cautious. Half the unhappy marriages are the cause of a woman's too complete trust in a man whom she knows little or nothing about, and half of the wretchedness and sin and misery. It is natural for young people to be attracted by each other, but it is not safe to allow the heart to pass into the keeping of any man, however fascinating, however apparently good, without first finding out who and what he is. You say he had a friend with him? Was this friend, then, so uncommunicative when he found tragedy was averted only through the mercy of Almighty God, who permitted that he should be near enough to come to your rescue? Did he tell you nothing more than that the young man had lied to you when he said that he was a Catholic?"

"Nothing more that I remember, Father—and I wouldn't be likely to forget."

"No, you would not, poor, motherless child! Ah, well, we may find out something yet. I shall make a note of this young man's name."

The priest took up his note-book and pencil.

"Laurence Hayes was his name, 'Larry,' his friend usually called him."

"Larry? Now, there might be some hope of a happy settlement to this unfortunate love affair, if it were a 'Larry' you had to deal with. I've known some fine fellows in the Old Country by the name of Larry—with the Hayes belonging to it, too. Now, tell me, why didn't you fix your affections on Mr. Larry Hayes, instead? Sure, there's no knowing why young women act so contrary."

"We can't help these things, Father."

"Oh, but you can. Everything has a beginning, and it is easy to check the beginnings. Well, now, you mustn't see this young man any more. No, not any more, till he does the right thing by you. If he wants to marry you, he'll come and ask your father for you. When a man truly loves a woman, my child, nothing has the power to stand long between himself and her, if she loves him in return—nothing but Almighty God and His laws. When your busy time at the Bluff is over, you must go away somewhere. Try to persuade your father to go with you. I'll do my best to coax the old gentleman into agreeing. Write, if you want to write, now, and tell this Mr. Allingham that in duty's name you feel bound to respect the wishes of your

father, which forbid the intimacy till he can see his way to make you his wife; and even then, in such event, he must agree to your being married in your own Church and conforming to the usual request. And pray, pray continually for his conversion, my child; and I shall not forget your intention at the Altar of God. Let me know how you get on; and do not give way to useless repining. Your Heavenly Father didn't put you into this world for nothing else than to make this selfish young man happy. Don't run away with that idea. You may be placed within a wide sphere of action yet. Sure, you haven't properly begun to live your life yet. With the fine physique you have, you were meant as a leader in the van of some of our grand Christian movements for the regeneration of mankind. Ah, believe me, child, there's no man in the world worth breaking your good heart over."

Corinne thanked him gratefully for his sympathy and advice, and rose to go.

"Wait now, I'll just get Mike to put the horse in the buggy. He can drive you within sight of the Bluff. And here's a new rosary from Rome for you, that was blessed by the Holy Father himself, and a few little pictures for your prayer-book. Tell your father I'll be soon down to see him. It's time he went to his duty."

Corinne felt the better for having had the good priest's sympathy and advice. It acted like a tonic upon her despondent spirit, and gave her food for healthful reflection. No, however her lover acted,

she was not to allow the life the great Creator had given her to be wrecked, to allow her spirit to be soured, and her heart to be hardened. She had heard and read that "disappointment in love" blighted many promising lives, and was given often as an excuse for an irritable and fault-finding old maid, and a mean and crusty old bachelor. Man might take it as a sufficient explanation of a narrow life, but would God?

Oh, how hard it seemed to wake morning after morning, as she did already, with a heavy weight upon the heart and disinclination for performing the duties so cheerfully accomplished, and even liked, before! How she sympathised with those who felt as she did! Yet, it was wrong, her own reason told her, for either her or them to give in to this benumbed feeling, and only perform the daily tasks half-heartedly, and with downcast face. "Lord, give me strength to rise above myself!" she prayed; "and, Our Lady of Victories, pray for me!"

Even if she lost the man she loved with all her yearning heart, she would act upon the priest's advice as literally as she could. Nature cried out against her forfeiting through her own act her chance of seeing her lover soon again; but strength was coming to her, a new spiritual force seemed within her since her rescue from the fate which had seemed a cruel certainty. Ah, yes, Laurence Hayes was good and kind and dependable; she wished she had a brother like him. Instinct told her that he

had fought for her with his friend to the best of his ability. His bright, boyish face rose up before her, and in her heart she called him friend—her friend. Perhaps, some day, she would hear from him; he would tell her all she wished to know.

After writing and re-writing her decision many times, and copying it over with the greatest attention to handwriting, composition, and spelling, Corinne at last despatched the fateful letter, and ate her heart out for days waiting for an answer which never came.

Events had been occurring in the Lowenthal household of which she had not the remotest idea. Mr. Lowenthal, Hugh's father, had been found dead in bed one autumn morning, and with the necessity of setting his affairs in order, and preparing to fulfil the wish expressed in the will, that, in the event of anything happening as had just occurred, he was to sell Melbourne properties and the bulk of the household effects, and take his mother to England, where she was to remain if she so desired, and occupy with him their old home in Kent until such time as he succeeded to the Earldom of Poppledene.

There was now no one between him and Poppledene but his uncle, and he was a very frail old man, so Hugh, though his heart had not changed towards Corinne, was farther away from a union with her than ever. He did not now consider his mother's opinion as much as he did his uncle's. If his uncle had died before his father, he would have braved his parents' anger and disapprobation, he thought, but

he did not care to face the Earl's cold, critical eyes and sarcastic voice. He had never cared much for his uncle. True, it was years since he had seen him. The trip to England was advisable, after all, in more ways than one. He could plan out his life better when he saw Poppledene again and had a serious talk with the old lord. He would not remain long "at home." He would make his mother's home in Kent so comfortable that she wouldn't care about facing the discomforts of a long sea journey again. When he reached Melbourne once more, he would be, to a certain extent, a free agent. In spite of Corinne's prohibition, he would go down to the Bluff and see her again, and "tell the old man a lie or two," if that would ease his silly old mind. At any rate, he could take Corinne an engagement ring this time, and dazzle the eyes of her suspicious and irascible parent with its beauty and value. But he would not go "till the last minute"—till his passage was booked, and all was ready for sailing. To write letters was of neither use nor wisdom. An hour's talk to Corinne would do more than all the letters he could compose. So he let a few weeks run by, secure in his belief of the girl's complete faith in him. And, to do him justice, he was grieving very sincerely for his father, who, in spite of a constant hauteur of manner, which he never wholly laid aside even in his children's presence, had inspired respect and regard.

The Lascelles had proved very sympathetic in his bereavement, and Isabel had given up whole days

to his mother to assist in the task of consoling her—no easy one, for she was of the nature that resents any show of pity in affliction.

Isabel was wise in the method she adopted to wean her way into the good graces of the poor "Countess." She told her that she had simply come to be useful, to do "the hundred and one irritating and hateful things" one is forced to attend to at such a time, such as answering letters of condolence, giving instructions to the dressmaker, etc. Mrs. Lowenthal accepted her services because she knew no other young girl of her acquaintance would do the tasks so gracefully and in such an altogether correct fashion.

"When I am settled in dear old Kent again, you must come and pay me a long visit, my dear," she said one day; "I shall write occasionally to you, and I hope you will not forget to send me a letter now and then."

Isabel's heart gave a triumphant throb. A visit to England was worth giving up a week's sunshine and gaiety for—to say nothing of the irksomeness of being at the beck and call of a very exacting, if highly-polished, noble dame. A few months in the Lowenthals' beautiful Kentish home, and who knew what might come of it? The coronet of a countess, perhaps!

So she still strained every nerve to win golden opinions from the heir-prospective to Poppledene and his mother, while far-away Corinne wept herself to sleep night after night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BURIAL OF A RING.

"Yes, I'm minding the house, sir, while Mr. Cabooley and his daughter are away. No, I have no idea, sir, where they have gone to, nor"—eyeing the handsome stranger suspiciously—"why they are away just now, when all the spring cleanin's on the go—no, no more than the man in the moon! Sure, I was never the one to bother the head of me about other people's business; and the old gentleman's always too cute a customer to let on as to his. No, nor I don't know whether they means to come back at all, at all, either! Keep your half-sovereign in your pocket, sir; you may be needin' it more than myself yet!—meanin' no harm; but the world's full of ups and downs, as poor Tim used to say when he was above ground, peace be to his soul! I wouldn't want payin' for the truth to be screwed out of me, when you've got it already.

"They do be sayin' that the place is to be sold up; but 'tis next door to a lie, for all I know, for some of the folk round the Bluff have nothing to do through the winter but spin yarns. Mr. Barr, up at the Coffee Palace, might be going to run it, along

with all his other concerns. 'Tis Barr's Bluff the district might be called, for he owns near every bit of ground he treads on. 'Tis his son that's sweet this many a day on pretty Miss Cabooley—but who wouldn't, says I? Sure, she's the flower of the country, with eyes like the sea itself, that do be speaking a hundred things at once, an' no man knowin' the meanin'!

"'Tis to old Mr. Barr I goes every week for the money; those were the only instructions I got, for they knew well 'twas myself would keep the place clean and tidy! An' if you're tired and thirsty after your walk, sir, seein' it was for nothing, you've only to say the word if you'd like a nice hot cup of tea or coffee. Or is it just a drink of milk and soda you'd be wantin'?"

But Hugh wasn't "after wanting" anything but the one person he had come so far to see.

Thanking the caretaker, he turned moodily away. So Corinne had flown off somewhere—evidently not anywhere near at hand—away from him, no doubt, away from him! The fancy was not a pleasant one. He kicked a stone away savagely from his path. What on earth had come over Corinne to cause her to be "up in arms" over a few weeks' silence? Her entire nature could not possibly alter in such a short period of time. Women like she was, he acknowledged, did not love at will. When they loved, they gave the whole heart, not for once, but for always. He must trace her if he could—but, how? It was out of the question that he should go to Barr's.

"Ten to one," if the old man were asked, he would say the same as the caretaker, and be far less civil about it. He would inquire at the baths, instead, and from the red-haired young man so diligently collecting mussels in an "Uncle Tom" handkerchief.

He met with no information, however. The Courboules had not told anyone where they were going. "The old gentleman was getting very feeble, and it was quite probable he would not open the place again, but lease it, or put it up for sale."

Hugh spent a day "hanging about" the Bluff on the off chance of hearing news of them, but all to no purpose.

Baffled at every point, and annoyed to exasperation, he saw there was nothing else for it but to return to town, his one spare day ere he sailed gone for ever!

He wandered to the Sword Rock, where he had so often met the lovely and trusting girl, and sat disconsolately in her favourite spot, thinking bitterly at last of the double part he had played, which, it seemed only too likely now, was to darken not only his own life, but Corinne's.

Yet, why should she not wait till his path grew more defined? They were both young, he and she. Other people had loved as truly, and waited for each other for long and dreary years, with little to console them save the knowledge of each other's truth and constancy.

With her and him, he hoped, it could only be a matter of one year's waiting. His uncle's hold on

life was very frail, and daily growing weaker, his medical adviser had written to Mrs. Lowenthal—"the thread might snap at any moment." When it did, then who should dare to dictate to Sir Hugh Lowenthal?

The mere sound of the title, ringing, as it suddenly seemed, in his ears, served to renew his confidence in the future. He would be superstitious for once, he decided, and look upon this keen disappointment as but a pointing of Fate's finger to the path he was destined to take.

First, though, as Corinne could not be present to hear his vows of lifelong fidelity—and never had she appeared so entrancingly beautiful and desirable in his eyes as now—he would make all right with his nagging conscience, and take an oath there, where they two had first known the ineffable joy of love's first kiss, to marry no other woman, to make no other—peeress or peasant—my Lady Lowenthal!

He jumped up, and, putting his lips to the jutting out portion of the grim grey rock, which had so often formed an arm for Corinne to lean against when his own arm was not available, he vowed to his Creator to fulfil to his utmost power all that Corinne Courboules had every right to expect from his honour and regard—to fulfil it, whatever the future might hold, provided that her love for him remained unchanged.

He now felt more at ease in his mind, and looked out calmly over the blue expanse of water, shim-

mering in the sunshine as it had never shimmered in hours more happy.

The waves seemed to laugh mockingly at him, and each passing seagull's cry was like a shout of derision at his new-made vow; but he smiled back a challenge to the sea and the birds that Corinne loved, for youth and strength and hope had again begun to glow within him. He turned his back upon the waters, deaf as he had ever been to the language of the sea.

There was but one more thing he desired to do before returning from his fruitless quest, and that was to bury the betrothal ring which he had brought with him, not so much to please Corinne, whose mind, he knew, was above such baubles, but to satisfy Sebastien's questions and his ideas of the conventional.

What place were fitter for the rite than the old trysting-spot? In olden days lovers buried their tokens and their letters in a spot only known to both. It was a quaint and romantic conceit, which would be sure to appeal to Corinne. So he chose a crevice deep within the rocks, where tiny plants were rearing their green and dainty heads—a sort of fairy garden by the sea.

He looked at the little green shoots with eyes that grew dim and wistful. They reminded him of the tendrils of love in his absent sweetheart's garden of the soul which he had taught to put forth fragrant leaves towards his. In a moment, the spot seemed doubly sacred to Corinne.

With the aid of his pocket-knife and a piece of sharp stone, he dug a tiny, but deep, grave for the costly ring—holding it a moment in his hand, and watching its valuable pearls and diamonds flash into a dazzling radiance in the slanting gleam of sunshine which had suddenly found out the elfin parterre of the rocks.

He did not see the pair of human eyes that watched him, nor had he any sense of the nearness of any other human, for his own eyes were “with his heart, and that was far away.”

Before he restored the ring to its little silk-lined casket, he asked himself how long it would be hidden out of sight of the dear eyes of the woman he loved!

A line from a popular Irish ballad flashed across his brain:

“It may be for years, and it may be for ever!”

He sighed heavily as he tore a leaf neatly out of his pocket-book, and wrote a few loving words to Corinne upon it, wrapping it around the case, which he then buried, disposing the soil tidily above it and around it, and setting again the tiny plant he had removed.

“I didn’t know it was in me to be so sentimental,” he thought, as he hurried back along the beach to catch the boat, “but I suppose it’s justifiable under the circumstances, and it may please my darling when she knows.”

That night he wrote a long letter to Corinne, passionately loving and remorseful, and explaining all.

He entreated her to be patient, and to write to him to a given address—that of his bankers in London.

In a fit of absent-mindedness, induced by his many conflicting emotions, he wrote his name in full. He sealed the letter without noticing this, and addressed it with a grimace of chagrin to the care of Barr, senior.

A few days after he sailed for England.

Laurence Hayes was among those who crowded to see him off—a puzzled and angry, yet loyal, Larry, who gave Hugh the benefit of the doubt as to whether he had gone to see Corinne before he left. For he did not know that the young girl had fled inland to find in new scenes and ideas some panacea for her sorely-wounded heart. Good-natured Larry determined to “run down” himself, and “see how the poor little girl was getting on.”

“Some Friday to Monday would suit admirably, and give me a chance to have a good chat with her. I could put up at old Barr’s.”

To keep guard over Corinne seemed, somehow, his bounden duty, and he wondered much why Lowenthal had not already delegated it to him.

As a matter of fact, the thought of doing so had more than once occurred to Hugh, but, each time, the “green-headed monster” had influenced him against the idea. “Larry was rather an attractive fellow, and—hang it, anyway, he didn’t want the woman he cared for to make a confidant of any man-friend, however trustworthy.”

The "Countess'" face was radiant as the steamer started to plough its way at last through the restless waters.

She had never been enamoured of Australia—"the land of the democrat," as she scornfully termed it.

"It has no society worthy of the name, as I have so often remarked," she said to her son, as, a stately figure in her mourning attire, she watched its shores fade from view. "The red blood of the labouring people permeates its laws, and it would never surprise me in the least to see a revolutionary flag in the ascendant there. I am glad to leave it—more than glad; but you seem anything but rejoiced, boy!—standing, as you are, in the attitude of the Flying Dutchman, dour and sombre-browed. One would think you were leaving behind you some treasure of untold value!"

"I am," Hugh answered gravely—"and two graves, also, mother—two graves on which the grass has not yet begun to grow."

CHAPTER VII.

IN AFTER YEARS.

Dr. Hayes was very tired. He had not yet become accustomed to the rough roads of mountainous country in whose centre his practice had been bought. Riding "took more out of him" than he had expected, yet driving was often out of the question. His predecessor, though elderly, had been a man of herculean strength, one who thought nothing of getting to horse again when home had just been safely reached after the hard work which had entailed the entire loss of rest and sleep. Old Dr. Norris had been the pride of the ranges. The people of the district had taken a personal pride in his exploits in their service; he had reflected credit upon them as upon himself.

"Norris and his old black horse, you can't beat 'em!" was the universal verdict. "If a man's lost in the bush, he's the first to join in the halloo, and carry everything that may be required with him, too—and a bottle of brandy to boot. He's part and parcel of the hills, an' may he never get his grand old neck broke when he's carrying all before him."

But when, one morning, "God's finger touched him, and he slept," and brave old Norris and his charger were things of the past, and another doctor took up his residence at "The Bungalow," doubt and dissatisfaction made their voices heard in the land, and many an old resident preferred to leave his chance of recovery to Providence rather than trust himself in the hands "of one of the raw lads fresh from their first experimenting on unfortunate folks' bodies."

The new doctor had the "new ways" with him—that was anything but in his favour. His manner might be all that could be desired, and his face pleasant to look upon, but "where would that tall skina-maleen be on a bush track in the dark? And what confidence could the father of a family put in such a bit of a lanky boy? As for his continual preaching against so much use of alcohol in emergencies, brandy and whisky had set more men and women on their legs than he would ever have the luck to do!"

Dr. Laurence Hayes hadn't had much reason, so far, to be enamoured of Musktown. He was "breaking himself in" slowly, but surely, and that was some satisfaction; but his prospects seemed "nil" as far as the making of money was concerned. He wanted to succeed for the sake of his profession alone—a profession which, theoretically, he loved; still, he could not live without money, and it was "like drawing a tooth" to get his well-earned fees out of some of the people of picturesque Musktown.

He sank into the inviting depths of the wide arm-chair wearily. It had been expressly made for the more corpulent form of Dr. Norris, and, except for his long legs, Larry was almost lost in it—a fact which pleased him this winter evening, promising as it did some degree of physical comfort within the glow of the bright flames leaping up the chimney from the big logs piled on each other in the wide fireplace.

“Upon my word, the want of a congenial companion here is enough to make a fellow want to chuck up the whole poverty-stricken business! It seems ages since I had a pal worthy of the name. I’ll be driven into matrimony yet!”

He smiled as he thought of the anxious, match-making mamma on the opposite side of the quiet country street, who lost no opportunity of “trotting out” her four apple-cheeked, but wide-mouthed, daughters, and bidding them play “The Fairy Queen Galop” or “The Maiden’s Prayer, with Variations,” for Dr. Hayes.

“Ailsa, Enid, Daphne, or Olive?” Alas! their names were the best of them!

Miss Mossley, the postmistress, was pretty and intelligent, and he could recall scores more who deserved both adjectives when he brought to mind the many girls he had met and liked through the years.

After all, among the lot, there was only one he had given a second thought to, and he had lost sight of her this many a day.

Corinne Courboules, of the beautiful face and fascinating accent—what had become of her? Had she settled down to the humdrum, hard-working lot of a settler's wife, dead to the best that was in her, as dead to the past?—tied, perchance, to a boor?

He moved restlessly in the cosy depths of the arm-chair as Tennyson's lines chimed in with his fears:

"Thou shalt lower to his level day by day,

What is fine within thee growing coarse to sympathise
with clay!"

Heavens, what a fate! He could not imagine it for the high-souled, lovely girl he remembered; and yet, and yet—women had been known to do strange and unaccountable things when love had failed them, finding too late that they had tied themselves with their own reckless hands to unspeakable degradation and misery.

"And Sir Hugh Lowenthal reigns alone at Poppledene!—no bountiful Lady of the Manor to dispense the benefits of his riches. Let me see"—musingly stroking his moustache—"how long is it since Isabel Lascelles went over to stay with the old lady? By the powers, it's close on two years! She'll have him yet, sure as a gun! Serve him right, if she does annex him; he deserves no better fate, after his treatment of Corinne—dear little, lovable little Corinne!"

Corinne wasn't little, by any stretch of the imagination, but with Larry, as with so many others

of his sex, the adjective was a term of endearment which it was always safe to indulge in.

"For some reason or other, she's been in my mind all day. It seems jolly odd that I never hear tale or tidings of her."

There was a knock at the door, and old Martha thrust her grey head in.

"The new nurse for the Sanatorium's here, doctor, and would like to see you before she's driven on. I told her you was dead-beat, an', like as not, you was 'avin' a doze, but I can't get rid of her nohow—says the matron wrote that she was to see you before she went on."

"Of course, of course!"—shaking himself up—"show her in at once, Martha. I'm quite wide awake, I assure you!"

He straightened himself, gave a pull to his collar, and moved towards the door. Perhaps the poor girl was dismayed to find that she still had so many miles to travel.

A young girl was standing on the threshold. She was, as he observed with satisfaction—his professional instincts rising—of fine physique for the work before her, though there was a look of girlishness about her that one associates only with those who are "where the brook and river meet," not with those who have been through the school of hospital experience.

She was veiled, and he could not see her features distinctly. He placed a chair near the fire for her,

and made the usual polite inquiries one makes of a new arrival from the city.

At the first sound of her voice in answer, he started. There was something familiar in the tone, something that suggested the foreigner or acquaintanceship with foreigners. Where had he heard it before? He wished she would lift up her veil. Why, in the name of common sense, did women persist in smothering up their faces with such unhealthy coverings?

A log end flared suddenly, and the flame shone direct on the new nurse's face.

Larry rose to his feet again, and grasped the mantelpiece with an unsteady hand.

"Am I—can I be mistaken? Are you—can you be—Miss Corinne Courboules!"

The young lady rose, and, bowing demurely, said: "Nurse Cora, at your service—Miss Courboules, if you will."

"But—but——"

Words failed Larry, as he caught her two hands and shook them up and down in gathering excitement.

"My father died—I was alone in the world—a kindly priest came to my assistance, and showed me what work was waiting for me in the world. He interested a good woman in me, and, through her, I entered on my career as a nurse. I had much to learn—I studied hard—I worked hard. But I met with kind people everywhere—and now I am here."

"Thanks be to God," added Dr. Hayes reverently. "You are the very woman needed up there in the Sanatorium. Between ourselves, Matron has made herself much disliked. You will see why later on. I trust to you to set a good deal right. But it is not only for the sake of the hospital I rejoice! I was lying back here, before you came, almost cursing the 'luck' that has dropped me down in such a place. Now, behold, the scene is changed—I have an old friend near me—if you will permit me to so term you?"

"Permit you? Oh, Dr. Hayes, if you only knew what a pleasure it was to me to see you here—here, where I had expected an utter stranger!"

Martha, well trained to her service, brought in "some refreshments for the young lady" at this juncture, and, as Corinne, or Nurse Cora, was obliged to speedily continue her journey to the uplands, opportunity for more than ten minutes' conversation was not granted them. There were instructions and messages to be taken for the matron, etc., and the time was absurdly inadequate for the indulging in of reminiscent remarks.

Nurse Cora was soon being borne at rapid speed through the darkness, but in Dr. Hayes' study there was a new light, a new brightness, and life seemed worth living in a tenfold degree! Corinne! Corinne!—and more beautiful than ever. The years had added grace upon grace. Yes, that was it—she was "a gracious woman, nobly planned."

What an unmitigated donkey Lowenthal had been! What was Isabel Lascelles, with all her well-bred mannerisms, compared with this fresh-souled daughter of Nature? He could see that she, Corinne, had lost nothing of her former sweet-souled self; she had gone onward, upward, not backward.

"And I shall have numberless opportunities of seeing her, of speaking to her," Larry thought exultantly, "bound as I am to pay my regular visits to the patients up there, and keep the fear of God in marble-hearted Miss Dunraven as well, that she may treat the poor wretches under her care as she is supposed to do, by bestowing on them a little more of the milk of human kindness. If all stories be true, she's not fit for her position. The unfortunate victims in the tents seem to have no love for her, anyhow. And good old Father O'Rafferty wouldn't have given her such a lecture for nothing the other day, considering that she should be a Catholic, if she isn't. If looks could have torn him to pieces for his outspokenness over the Pemberton affair, there wouldn't have been much of him left! Oh, well, Corinne will be a match for her, and straighten things up a bit, or I'm no judge of character! It's marvellous to see how that girl has developed; I can't get over it."

Dr. Hayes had to exercise much tact and prudence in the renewal of his friendship with "Nurse Cora," for Miss Dunraven was a woman of not only "hard," but jealous, disposition. No one under her could hope for consideration; she rather liked being feared.

Nurse Cora, however, proved herself too clever and useful a member of the little community on the hills, which boasted the only accommodation for hundreds of miles for consumptives, to be altogether "ridden over," and her splendid health was a valuable asset when one nurse after another had broken down through alleged overwork, and had "deserted."

Miss Dunraven, like most of her ilk, was extremely anxious to stand well in both Dr. Hayes' and Dr. Johannsen's opinion—the latter visiting from the larger town of Wellbury.

As far as her establishment went, she had every reason to be proud of its appointments—a well-to-do father furnishing it throughout according to her own plans, which were at once modern and scientific.

"A woman of mind, but not of heart," both medical men had summed her up to be, and had never found any reason why their opinion should be changed. She was wrapped in enough self-conceit to keep herself warm. The pity of it was that a cruelly sarcastic tongue stripped the covering off everybody else.

CHAPTER VIII.

KNIGHTS IN ARMOUR.

Isabel Lascelles walked slowly down the marble terrace which lent such beauty to the stately front of Poppledene Manor. The gardens were aflame with bright-hued blossoms, whose congregated wealth of colouring was as skilfully and harmoniously arranged as an exquisite musical symphony. Noble oaks, elms, and beeches spread their well-trained branches in varying tones of green, forming a delightful background to the soft-petalled glory. Here and there quaint arbours, covered with climbing plants and roses, invited to reverie. The air was filled with perfume—a languorous stillness breathed everywhere.

Wherever she gazed, Isabel saw nothing but beauty—from the grand old pile of buildings with its “windows richly dight” to the great Gothic gateway, the carvings of which were black with age, as were the armorial bearings of the Lowenthals on the crown of the arch—and past her gaze, further than her eyes could see in the space of a day, was more beauty of landscape and many a nestling village—and all was Hugh Lowenthal’s, who, as yet, was but her friend.

Her mind travelled back to the noble hall, with its groined roof and painted windows, its grim suits of armour, its ancient weapons and trophies of the chase; to the panelled walls, and Gothic casement-windows beyond, set as they were in deep embrasures, and to the portraits of Lowenthal cavaliers and dames; to the high mantelpieces, with stories carved in "alto rilievo;" to her own suite of rooms, a marvel of modern luxury; and her heart beat high at the possibility still before her.

She glided rather than walked along. No "vulgar haste" should mar the dignity of her carriage when somebody's dark eyes might be watching—and admiring—her swanlike movements, and finding them appropriate to their beautiful surroundings.

Oh, to be mistress of these broad and verdant lands!—to hear "My Lady" from his tenants' lips, to queen it over his magnificent mansion in London, now shut up and gloomy, awaiting the day when the arrival of a bride should restore its gaiety and brilliance!

Isabel had had "a royal time" since she had come, a welcome guest, to Poppledene. Balls and parties of every description had been given in her honour as soon as the conventional period of mourning for the old Earl had expired. She had been presented at Court by "the Countess" herself, and had borne herself with the grace and ease of "the daughter of a hundred earls." She had had offers of marriage from two younger sons of titled families, and had received invitations from families whose pedigree

could be traced back to William the Conqueror. A social success, surely! Still, she had had, on the other hand, to do much violence to her own natural inclinations in order to become gentle and patient and lovable, in seeming at least, under any and every circumstance—not only to retain the affection and regard of Mrs. Lowenthal, but in order to win Hugh's. For, apart from his possessions, Isabel Lascelles had grown to love him for himself alone.

That she had not yet succeeded in gaining more than a brotherly regard, largely founded upon gratitude for her kindness to his mother, she was perfectly aware. But the cold, unornamented fact had lost its power to chill her. He would miss her now; she was fast becoming part and parcel of the place.

"The Countess" had kept Isabel in England longer than she had ever had the remotest idea she would be kept, failing marriage—longer than her constant need of fine attire could possibly have afforded, for the Lascelles' "grandeur" was built up on the quicksands of debt, and ready money was ever scarce with each and every one of them.

Constant presents from Mrs. Lowenthal, however—given in the delicate way that one lady knows how to give another without causing a feeling of humiliation or wounded pride—had enabled her to "manage;" also, her many lucky winnings at "bridge," we must add!—and she was always beautifully and appropriately gowned, the change of climate agreeing so perfectly with her naturally healthy constitution that she had less occasion than

of old to resort to artifice for the heightening of her beauty.

Sir Hugh found it pleasant enough to have a young and attractive face at the tea-urn, a young voice refined and musical about the home, youthful spirits in the chase—for both rode out with the hounds. Isabel was a fine horsewoman, and never appeared to greater advantage than when on horseback.

A great painter of the day, on a winter visit to the Manor, had painted Miss Lascelles as "*L'Equestrienne*," and the picture had already been given an honoured place in one of the famous galleries of the world.

"Isabel is as a daughter unto me," Mrs. Lowenthal was never weary of saying, and, often, Sir Hugh caught her faded eyes wandering wistfully from him to the girl, as if she longed with all her heart for their union as man and wife.

The elder lady was growing very feeble, and clung to Isabel with pathetic regard. She could not bear to hear her speak of Australia, or even of her own people. It was only to Hugh that Miss Lascelles could open her lips on home subjects at all; and, sorry enough for her at times, he usually affected the deepest interest in her relations and friends, and their Melbourne doings. She mostly read the greater part of her many letters to him, and, in a way, he enjoyed the hearing. He corresponded with his old friend Laurence occasionally, but had lost touch with his other University chums.

From Corinne he had never received a line, but one never-to-be-forgotten morning, not long after his uncle's death, the leaf from his note-book which had enwrapped the casket containing the buried betrothal-ring reached him within a type-written envelope.

From that unexpected, and, he thought, undeserved, blow his heart had not yet rallied. He was a changed man from that time, his smile rarer and graver, his face lined and saddened, his eyes full of a sombre light, like that on the sea where there are sunken rocks.

There was no doubt in his mind but that Corinne had sent him the leaflet herself. There was certainly no other conclusion to arrive at.

That he suffered—and suffered deeply—goes without saying. But, in the lonely depths of that suffering, all that was shallow and selfish in the man was gradually incinerated—slowly, it is true, but none the less surely.

The Hugh Lowenthal that Isabel Lascelles loved with all the love she was capable of feeling for any human being was a decidedly nobler man than he to whom Corinne had given her passionately-loving woman's heart years before.

Among Sir Hugh's own tenants he was well liked and respected, and many had found the benefit of his medical training. He had seen that all dwellings were constructed on a sanitary basis, and any outbreak of sickness was the signal for his appear-

ance among his people as a severer health-inspector than any appointed by the law of the land. But England had no charm for Hugh Lowenthal. He was ever restless in spirit, ever dreaming of returning to Australia, of finding Corinne, of seeing for himself what she had made of her life. He could not bring himself to think of her as a married woman; his whole nature protested against the mere idea. As a woman would express it, "something told" him she was still true to his memory.

He had written letters to her, on his voyage, always addressing them to the Bluff. Where else was an address to find her?

No answer had ever been vouchsafed him, though his heart had grown sick with longing for a sight of her handwriting, for one word of love!

Hugh had found the late Earl a thorough aristocrat, who would have considered his marriage to a plebeian high treason of the deepest dye. Moreover, he had found the old gentleman in that nervous state of prostration when it was required of all who came in contact with his personality that they should do their best to humour his little caprices and whims, and, above all, to do nothing to irritate or worry him. His nephew's return had given Sir Bede great pleasure, and the light of his life's lamp had flared up for a month or two with renewed vigour ere it finally flickered again and went out for ever.

During the second year of his sojourn in England, it was out of the question that Sir Hugh

should go back to Victoria. But he hoped to do so during the autumn of the following year, and had informed his mother accordingly—to her great grief and chagrin. What in the world could a son of hers see in that country of the “bourgeois”!

As Isabel sauntered along the terraces, a graceful figure in her softly-flowing gown of golden-brown, her dark hair picturesquely coiled at the back of her shapely head, she looked all that she desired to be—the Lady of the Manor.

Hugh, strolling out leisurely in the same direction, thought her, as she, hearing his footsteps, turned her face towards him, a charming picture, her eyes shone so brightly, so vividly pomegranate-red were her lips, so delicately ivory her complexion.

“Do your thoughts run into poems, this glorious day, friend Isabel?”

“Rather they run ‘on’ poems, Sir Hugh! Anything less than the thoughts and dreams of a Tennyson were out of place here!”

“You love this home of ours, Isabel?”

A flood of carmine dyed the smooth cheeks.

“I do,” she answered almost passionately. “From tower to sward it appeals to me. I would ask nothing better of life than to live and die in a home like this!”

“I think you were meant to dwell in baronial halls,” he said lightly, though making a mental note of the intensity of emotion in her words. “Let us hope that some day you will! I am surprised at

your cruel indifference towards that bleating—I mean, pleading of young Hector Beauregard! Lord of wide demesnes he has every chance to be—no one in his way but a poor, sickly lad. Do you never mean to marry, Isabel?”

Again the rich blood mounted to her cheeks.

“’Twere rash to say no, Sir Hugh!—for I am but a woman, and every woman finds it sweet to be wooed and won—by the right man. Should I marry, I must wed one who is of ‘the finer grain,’ or I should be unhappy. If one of your ancestors in there could step off his pedestal, and come to life again, I might ‘fall down and worship’! Hector Beauregard is a mere blundering boy.”

“And you a lady of old romance!—wandering all in a garden fair. Prithee, sweet maid, if one of my doughty ancestors were to kneel before thee—as would be more becoming for him than for thee—and solicit the favour of your little lily-white hand, what would your answer be? I am curious to know!”

Isabel thought she detected an undertone of deeper meaning beneath the playful words, and answered, curtsying low: “Thy liege lady I will be; and I shall keep the honour of thy glorious name untarnished, and uphold the dignity and the traditions of thy house, while life and strength are left within me!”

There was something so true and loyal in the girl’s soft tones, the words uttered so modestly

withal, that Sir Hugh was touched in spite of himself.

"I believe you would," he said, musingly, lifting her hand and kissing it, courtier-fashion. "From my soul, I believe you would!"

And Isabel was more than satisfied.

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"The Countess" had seen her son's lover-like action from her balcony, and rejoiced.

"It is only a matter of a short time longer," she thought, "and she shall be one of us, as she deserves to be. I must place every difficulty in the way of his going back to Australia that ingenuity can devise. Isabel shall have every opportunity given her for remaining always—always—with me—and with my son."

CHAPTER IX.

WITH THE SUNSET GLORY ON THE SEA.

“Corinne, Corinne! the gulls are calling
From headland and from rocky cave,
Where, with a wild and sad insistence,
The winds and waters mourn and rave.

“Corinne, Corinne, the foamy surges
Reverberating on the shore,
Your story tell in organ music,
And bid you listen evermore!”

It was over a month before Dr. Hayes had a chance of an hour's conversation with Nurse Cora, though he saw her frequently when on his regular visits to the patients at the Moritza Sanatorium.

It would not have been advisable to show more than the most ordinary interest in any of the nurses, and he knew that Corinne had enough common sense not to expect more than the usual civil formalities and instructions while under Miss Dunraven's searching, eagle eye.

But an emergency case some miles down among the rougher labouring classes at Consinjinnie had called for a trained nurse's immediate services, and with much grumbling at what she termed “the con-

summate impudence of the common people," but with a wholesome fear of the doctor's censure if she refused aid, the matron sent Nurse Cora, as she was daily proving herself more and more competent and skilful, and, above all, in Miss Dunraven's estimation, "quick as a needle in her movements, with an eye to correspond."

A Cornishman had come to blows with a lodger who had insulted him, and his plucky little wife, in endeavouring to stem the torrent of their blind rage and part the infuriated combatants, was seriously injured.

The nurse was on the scene long before the doctor, who had been sent for post-haste; and, when he arrived, the place, which had previously resembled a shambles, more than the abode of Christian men and women, was restored to order and cleanliness, and the unfortunate victim of man's ungovernable passions fixed up as comfortably as skilled feminine hands could manage.

After the doctor's part had been done, and all arrangements made for having the woman taken to the district hospital, he sent away the jinker which had brought Corinne and drove her back to "Moritza" himself, a kindly service he had often performed for other nurses under the like circumstances, and one which even Miss Dunraven would expect from him as a gentleman.

Nurse Cora found the change of vehicle much more comfortable, and leaned back against the softer support thankfully, to rest her aching limbs.

The road led upward, and was very steep—in some parts dangerous—so Dr. Hayes let his thoroughbreds “take it easy,” and lost no time otherwise in asking Corinne the many questions he had been burning to ask ever since he had “found” her again.

The young girl was not quite as communicative as he could have desired—on some matters—but, as far as giving a graphic account of the minor events which had transpired since she had left the Bluff on her first brief holiday, she was confidential enough.

“I had never been inland, as you are aware, and though I was a true lover of the sea, and ever shall be, I thought the country town of Silverbell delightful. To see hills so vividly green, to wander among the sweet-smelling flowering shrubs and the bushes, to pluck the wild flowers and ferns at will, and, more than all, to see the benefit of the change soon manifest itself in my poor ailing father, was a great pleasure, and one which made some amends for much that was troubling me at the time and clouding my spirits.

“While my father and I were still away in the country, a letter came from old Mr. Barr offering a good price for our home at the Bluff, and father decided to consider it. It was full time for the season to start when we returned, and, as you know, having, you tell me, called at the rooms during its beginning, we gave the business entirely over to Mr. Barr, and removed some of the household furniture

—part of which he had 'bought in'—and went to live privately twenty miles further down the coast, in a spot that had, some time before, taken poor father's fancy, if not mine.

"The coast was more rugged, and the sea came rolling in with more grandeur, and he loved to hear the waves thundering on the rocks; it spoke to him of Brittany, and every day his mind seemed to travel farther back to the days of his childhood. He constantly spoke of the fishing hamlets, and of the many tragedies which used to occur in stormy weather, as also of the great longing which had for years possessed him to return to France, had he had the means.

"In the fall of the year he began to decline in health considerably, but could not be induced by the doctor to travel inland again while he still had strength.

" 'I was bred by the sea, and I want to die with its voice in my ears,' was the answer invariably given, and at last accepted by Dr. Hamilton.

"He grew very ill. The priest was sent for, good Father Dalton. He received the last rites of the Church, was much comforted by them, and by Father Dalton's earnest assurance that he would place me with friends and relations of his own till I could see my way through the world more clearly. Then, one calm evening, just at sunset, the end came—or, rather, the 'beginning' of the marvellous life to be!"

She paused, struggling with her emotions, then resumed her narrative, while the doctor sat sympathetically silent.

"It was the most glorious sunset for that time of year which I have ever seen, or, perhaps, ever shall see.

"The waters were calm, the winds were still. A steamer was going out, slow and stately, its long trail of smoke rising upward till it seemed to reach the grey border that hung below the red and golden clouds, whose glory streamed on sea and land, on rock and headland, on the masts of dismantled vessels far away, that were outlined against the horizon, and in through the wide casement windows on to the form of my father, who was watching it with peaceful, dying eyes.

"On the white sails of the yachts coming home it gleamed, and on the smaller boats following in their wake.

"Lakes, and islets, and hills seemed in that lovely sky, which brought to mind beautiful stories of the Everlasting Country beyond.

"Father pointed to it with one weak, trembling finger, and said to me in French, 'They shine through—the pitying hearts of Mary the Blessed and her Divine Son!'

"A pathway outlined itself through all, as if it were indeed leading direct to the shining gates of heaven, which, surely, were not shut, but open—opened wide!

"After a few moments, half raising himself, he suddenly cried out, clear and loud as he had ever done:

"'Antoine! Antoine!—bientôt, bientôt!' and was gone."

Tears choked the filial daughter's voice, but she soon continued her story, for, alas! she was well schooled in self-restraint now, the poor Corinne!

"Father Dalton carried out his promise faithfully—may God for ever bless and reward him—and, as my father had left me enough to keep me from want for a year or two, I was enabled to study and prove by steady application that I was not altogether unworthy of his good opinion and his unfailing kindness. Knowledge I sought greedily, for in it was distraction from other worries. They called me an apt scholar. I only know it saved me from despondency, and a sort of dull despair."

Laurence could not resist asking—after expressing his sympathy sincerely and tactfully—"And, during all that sad time, you did not once receive a line from my friend Hugh?" He barely breathed the question, so afraid was he of "making a mess of things."

"All that time I did not once receive a 'line' from Mr. Allingham," Corinne answered quietly, looking away from the too-expressive eyes.

"Well, I'm blest if I can fathom him!—and I thought I knew his nature pretty well," he began.

But Nurse Cora put up her hand, and smiled, if wanly, at least with ordinary brightness.

"There is no need to try, is there?" she asked gently. "Ah, Dr. Hayes, believe me, I am quite willing to 'let the dead past bury its dead!'"

"I'm blest if I am, though!" spluttered the indignant Larry, under his breath. "There's a screw loose somewhere."

After a few moments' silence he asked her did she ever see anything of the Barr family since her father's death.

"Mr. Jim Barr," he said, teasingly, "would, I know, be loth to drop acquaintanceship!"

Corinne's pale pink colour deepened to the richest peach.

"I can't stand Jim Barr!" she said, with sudden and pretty fierceness.

"Ha, ha, Miss Corinne! Your agitation tells its own tale. Jimmy—pardon the liberty!—hasn't given up hope yet?"

"I can't drive any sense into his head," Corinne said testily. "I've snubbed him outrageously in sheer desperation, but he persists in 'turning up' regularly and unexpectedly wherever I am domiciled, and pestering me—quietly, you know, but none the less aggravatingly. Only for his many past kindnesses to my poor father—and to myself—I'd never open my lips to him again. He has altered very much—grown so morose and strange—is not a bit like the good-natured, manly Jim he used to be!"

"'All for the love of a lady!'" sang the doctor, giving his horses a flick of the whip at last, for they were now on level ground. "Forgive me, Mademoiselle, but I couldn't resist the quotation. If Barr annoys you in any way in future, here or elsewhere, just let me know, will you?" and he squared his jaw determinedly.

"Thank you, I will. I own that once or twice, lately, I have felt just a little bit scared of him. I suppose he has got on my nerves."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor, falling into a few moments' serious reverie.

Awaking from it, he took out his watch, and looked at the time.

"Exactly one half-hour in which to talk of pleasant things! Let us make the most of it, Mademoiselle Corinne!"

He did at any rate, for Larry was fast falling in love himself with the beautiful and attractive girl. And he was by no means a poor lover, for he had plenty of genuine Irish blood in him, and all the poetry of the true Celtic spirit; and no Pat, talking to his Eily down in the boreen, knew better "how to be improving the time" when lovely eyes, deep and clear, with all the dreams of the sea within them, were looking into his, and a soft voice, with all the music from unseen fairy harps in its melody, was speaking just beside.

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On his return to Musktown, old Martha put in his hand a letter with an English post-mark upon it.

"From Lowenthal, by all that's remarkable!" he thought, and read its contents hastily. They evidently did not please him, for he sank into his study chair with a groan, throwing the epistle to the other side of the room, where it stuck fast between the neck and shoulder of a grinning Chinese mandarin.

"What awful luck!—just as things were going on swimmingly for me, too. 'Find Corinne,' indeed! 'Even if you have to employ a private detective.' What confounded impudence! 'I enclose a cheque for expenses.' His cheque will go where I'd like to send him! He only 'wants to know if she's alive and happy.' I've a good mind to write at once, and say, 'Yes, thanks, she's decidedly both, and will be more so when she's Mrs. Larry Hayes!' It would serve His Royal Impudence right."

But feelings of indignation soon gave place to the cool arguments of reason.

"The fellow cares just as much for her still, that's very evident. Now, what the dickens kept him from seeing her before he sailed? That's what I'd like to know—and must find out. My dear Hugh," apostrophising the mantelpiece in the absence of the offender, "there'll be no good little, sweet little, lovely maiden's whereabouts traced for you, old chap, till Larry Hayes knows more. Time enough when you've answered the epistle I'll make it my business to write to do a bit of searching then—heart-searching only, considering I know 'her whereabouts.' And, my dense young man, lord or no lord, if she satisfies me that her old regard for

you is dead, as you deserve it to be, nothing short of her utter disdain will keep me from proposing. 'All's fair in love or war,' and, if you're 'a laggard in love,' I certainly can't be. Should she care for you still—ah, well, I suppose I'd do my duty by you both; but it would come jolly hard now!"

He stared gloomily in front of him.

Old Martha opened the door.

"Is that there supper to go stone cold, an' you standin' there like a hen with one leg?"

CHAPTER X.

PEARLS FOR TEARS, DIAMONDS FOR CON-
STANCY.

Jim Barr had been an unintentional witness of the burial of the ring. He had gone for a long walk on the beach, and, feeling tired, had lain down in the shelter of the Sword Rock to rest, pulling his hat over his eyes preparatory to indulging in what he called "a snooze."

He had dropped off to sleep, as a matter of fact, and it was Lowenthal's restless movements that had awakened him.

Always slow to act, Jim did not make his presence known by either cough or yawn, as another would have done, but first "took stock" of the man, whom he at once recognised as one of the summer visitors at the Bluff. Had he not in some instinctive way suddenly begun to associate him with Corinne, no harm to anyone might have resulted. But, in a flash, he remembered the frequency of the letters received in a handwriting which the appearance of this stranger gave him every reason to suppose he might have written.

What was this well-dressed, aristocratic-looking man doing down there at such a time? Had he come after Corinne, not aware that she was away? There would be no harm in watching him for a while, anyway.

So he leaned back in the shelter of the rocks again, and never let his eyes wander from Hugh, while he, unobserved as he thought, carried out the little sentimental rite which was to bring joy to the heart of a loving girl.

The sound of his footsteps had barely died away before the tiny grave was desecrated by a ruthless hand! Jealousy and suspicion scowled from the plain, sun-browned face bending above; and it was not for the sake of the glittering jewels, costly though they were, and worth more money than he could "raise," that Jim Barr resolutely thrust casket and wrapper into his breast pocket, and, sitting down on a boulder below, meditated what he would have been surprised and indignant to hear anyone call villainy.

Barr had been brought up by the most honest of parents, and would have scorned to steal a penny; but jealousy sees darkly, and he was more deeply attached to Corinne Courboules than even her father had any idea of. To Barr, the attentions of a man of Lowenthal's type could mean but one thing; and when he had recognised Hugh as the same individual whom the girl had favoured above others during the past season, as also the one over whose attentions there had been "some mysterious row"

the night before "Allingham" left, he felt justified in finding out all he could, and in carrying out any plan which might be the means of causing Corinne to forget what could only be flirtation on her part and "deep-dyed wickedness" on the other.

His eyes, always observant of the shadow of a change in the young girl's expression, had noted long her sudden falling-off in radiance of look and blitheness of spirits. There was not the slightest doubt in his mind but that some act of Hugh "Allingham's" was at the root of it. But why had he hidden the ring there which, if really meant for Corinne, surely need not have been buried out of sight in such a lonely spot? A wild exultation took possession of him that even in one small way he was able to thwart some plan of his rival.

What he should ultimately do with such a valuable article did not trouble him just then. All he knew was that he regretted from his inmost heart ever having given love-letters from another man to Corinne Courboules, greedy only for a smile from her lips, for a grateful look from her eyes! He had been to blame, after all. What good had it brought her to have this stranger interest himself in her? As far as he could see, he was steadily breaking her heart. If he wanted to marry her, why did he not say so, like any other honest man, and let the engagement be publicly announced? He did not wonder at her father's hostile attitude even to a friendship between them. Now, if it had been "the other young man," things might have been different.

He felt that he might be able to bear her loss better had she been wooed and won by the franker-eyed, boyish-mannered younger "fellow."

Before he himself could possibly make headway, this foolish infatuation of Corinne's must be completely done away with. Who would treat her more kindly, or be more faithful to her, than he—James Barr? "Old friends are the best friends"—ay, and so were "old lovers" the best of lovers! He hoped to be able to prove it yet.

He walked along the beach slowly, in the very track of Lowenthal, by the irony of fate, and, deceit being new to him, spent a restless night.

After the Melbourne mail came in next day, it chanced that he was in the office helping his father, and the letter for Corinne was passed across to him to be re-addressed.

Some time later, Jim "made up" the bag for the city, and sealed it, his father having been "bailed up" in the store by a garrulous old squatter from some miles inland. After its despatch, he went out quietly "to have a smoke," and by a back way turned beachwards, opening, as soon as he was out of sight of a possible wayfarer, the passionately worded appeal of Hugh to Corinne, and the explanation which was to have removed immediately all her fears, doubts, and anxieties.

When a woman reads another woman's love-letter to a man she loves herself, a sort of contemptuous pity usually mingles with her anger; she does

not exactly hate her rival unless she has altogether ousted her from what seemed an assured place in her lover's heart. But when a man reads another man's love words to the woman he cares for above all others, then does Satan have full opportunity for letting his most malignant demons into his soul. A woman has more conceit of her own power to fascinate and enthrall; a man mostly sums himself up as lacking in some one essential which other men appear to have to render themselves pleasing in the eyes of the more exacting sex. And Jim was keenly sensitive to the fact that he was plain of feature and blunt of manner, as well as a stranger to the suave courtesies that come so naturally to a man of professional education. He could never hope to express his feelings and sentiments as "this town fellow" had done; it was "too much like reading a book," this long and flowery epistle! Every endearing word, too, struck him like a blow, for, above all things, Jim was jealous—horribly, dangerously jealous.

What did he, this Hugh Lowenthal, who had actually had "the face" to "pass himself off" under a different name at Sebastien's, mean by asking Corinne, who was of Corral's Bluff and its people, to "wait" for him while he calmly took ship to the other end of the world—there to forget her, in all probability, as soon as he had seen a prettier face among those of his own station in life?

Jim felt quite virtuous in his determination to stave off such a fate for the young girl. Yes, he

would act friend and brother to her in such a crisis of her life, and this extravagantly-written effusion should never reach her. He would find out who the man really was, what his true occupation was, and then, perhaps—well, he could judge better what was best to do.

He was but following the devil's old beaten track! Every wrong-doer begins by excusing himself to himself with the first false step made, and Barr felt little compunction when he had fairly started on the downward track.

It did not take him long to trace Lowenthal's history. He came back from Melbourne one night in full possession of the fact that he was heir to an estate and title in England, and had gone "over there" to step into a dying uncle's shoes.

The information hardened Barr's heart altogether. His first suspicions were correct, he decided, and no good could possibly accrue to Corinne from the intimacy. He was more than ever resolved to destroy the letter, which he always carried about with him wherever he went, in company with the ring. The wrapper he forwarded, as we know, to the address, he was assured, would find him personally.

By this time, long brooding over the one subject had begun to play havoc with his reasoning powers, and thus Corinne was subjected to a ridiculous and petty persecution, which was often irritating beyond all endurance. His idea that she must accept him in the end, if only as a reward for his perseverance

and faithfulness, became fixed, and he considered it but a natural thing—nay, more, a bounden duty—to be a sort of watch-dog over her movements, and to keep himself “fresh” in her memory.

In vain did Corinne resort to devices to hide her address when quitting one place for another. The irrepressible Jim “turned up” solemn and persistent in unwelcome attention every time. If she returned from a day’s hard work in lecture-room or ward, and was told that “an old friend from the country” was waiting for her in the reception-room, instinct informed her “the old friend” was none other than James Barr, jun.; and so it proved in nine cases out of ten.

Now, as she had told Laurence Hayes, he had quite “got upon her nerves.” Truth to tell, the last time she had rebuffed him—and with more than ordinary vehemence of tone. He had said, slowly and with sullen anger, that “if he didn’t marry her, nobody else should,” least of all one of the “gentleman class.”

Had he talked more fiercely and volubly, Corinne would not have taken so much notice of his words, but, little used as she was to the ways of men, there was something in Barr’s look and tone that chilled her and frightened her.

Once, her answer to him had been that his religion formed a sufficient barrier within itself, but he had said immediately that “what she was, was good enough for him,” and, anyhow, he “was nothing in particular.”

She had also tried to be sisterly, poor girl, thinking to appeal to his better nature, but found that kinder words only served to raise hopes which it would be wrong to encourage even in the slightest degree.

It was not only for the sake of a strongly-growing dislike to young Barr that Nurse Cora dreaded his constant appearances, unexpected as they always were. It was chiefly because he reminded her of sufferings which she would fain strive to forget. Only her Creator knew what heart-pangs had been hers since she last saw Hugh Lowenthal! There had been long, wakeful nights, when even prayer could not solace her, when words of appeal to God for strength were but dumbly raised, and only "Mother Mary, pity me!" formed a prop to sustain, to console, to urge on, to endeavour. Her crucifix and her rosary—these were the books which taught her at last self-control and the beauty of self-sacrifice!

CHAPTER XI.

SIR HUGH RECEIVES AN ANSWER.

“Running knee-deep in a field of clover,
Laughing and singing comes Love, the rover!”

Past orchards promising a wealth of fruit, past fields covered with corn and clover, past pleasant brooks and hills where artists loved to wander, the lord of Poppledene flew onward, mounted on his favourite horse, “The Corsair”—a noble animal, black, clean-limbed, and swift as the steed of an Arab.

Hugh Lowenthal was angry—furious, perhaps, would express his state of mind better—and he was riding himself into the equanimity he affected as the only possible state for a being endowed with reason and intelligence.

He carried a letter with him, each word of which was eating into the vitals of his heart. It was the answer sent by Larry by the first outward mail for London. It was clearly and logically written, yet every sentence cut Hugh deeply. It was the letter of a man unto a man for whom old feelings of admiration had died a natural enough death, having nothing to feed on to keep up “the sacred fire”;

it was the letter of a man who was not afraid to speak what he apparently considered to be the unflattering truth; and—worse still—it was the letter of a man who was alive with that indescribable, exultant feeling which tells him that his chance in love and life is quite as good as, if not better than, that of the man to whom he writes!

By a noble stream (on his own estate still), full of fish and beautifully clear, Lowenthal paused at length, and, dismounting and tying up his horse, flung himself down on a grassy knoll, and read and re-read this un-Larry-like epistle.

“By all that’s wonderful, the fellow has changed marvellously!” Hugh muttered. “It’s not so long since he seemed but the average youth, and easy enough to lead by one like myself. Now we seem to have changed places, and he is actually presuming to lecture me, and, in a sense, to defy me. I’m—sorry I ever asked him to find Corinne for me; better to have given the search into the hands of a competent detective myself. But I thought I could rely upon the boy to be more discreet, and, if all came to all, perhaps to act ‘John Alden’ for me! Fool! fool! Why, he is infatuated with her himself—a contingency I hadn’t looked for! And he has the audacity to tell me here that if he finds her, ‘as he hopes to do,’ he will give her an opportunity to accept or refuse him, unless I can give him—him, forsooth!—‘a full and satisfactory explanation of my past treatment of her’! He seems to have absolutely no idea that I am not the wrong-doer, but the

wronged. I have not a friend left in the world that I care about. Who believes in me, trusts in me, really loves me? Only my mother, after all!"

He gazed round him moodily. The reeds swaying by the river, the murmuring grasses, the bowing wild-flowers, the soft zephyrs that stirred them, whispered one other name—"Isabel! Isabel!"

"Yes, Isabel," he said softly, answering them as if they were living things. "Poor Isabel!"

A vision rose up before his mind of the graceful, soft-voiced girl with the changeful eyes and stately manner.

"I might do worse than marry Isabel," he thought. "Why should I make myself miserable about a girl who probably does not care a straw about me now, whatever she did in the past? I am afraid I am wholly unworthy of my ancestry, in that pride in itself does not help me to forget, much less cease to love, the one woman that seemed to me an embodiment of all that was sweet and desirable and beautiful of her sex. The whole affair of her long silence is a mystery—a mystery I do not like. Had it not been for the return of that leaflet, I should be inclined to suspect someone of meddling or mischief-making. But nothing ever went wrong before; she received safely the hundreds of letters I wrote her previously. Surely"—and his face grew darkly red—"she could not have demeaned hers by marrying a fellow so much beneath one of her gifts as that young Barr! If she has, then I have been utterly mistaken in her from the first. Well, if I

have, I shall not be the first man in the world to rank too high the qualities of a woman."

He put his hand into his breast-pocket, and took out a small sketch from his pocket-book—a sketch of Corinne made by his own pencil while at Corral's Bluff, and carefully preserved by him ever since in lieu of a portrait.

He gazed long and tenderly at the noble head, the perfectly-formed and expressive features, then, with a mist dimming his eyes, said aloud: "Truth is written there, constancy is engraven there! No, I cannot, and I will not, believe other than that there has been some hideous mistake, and that Corinne is as true to me as when, in the shade of the old Sword Rock, she gave me our betrothal kiss!"

His thoughts softening towards Corinne, they began to soften also towards Larry.

"Can't blame him, poor chap, after all. His letter is just what any man with a sense of honour as regards the weaker sex would write to another whom he had no reason for supposing to be other than a profligate, though he once called him friend and comrade. Our letters to each other have been too short—not confidential enough. I shall answer this annoying epistle of his, and ask him what the devil he means, the while I vindicate myself the best I know how. 'Lit his pipe with my cheque,' did he? Poor old Larry! I fancy I see him—true to 'Lucy Hinton' yet, I suppose—getting through the dreary hours in that back-country hole as best he can. There's one thing I envy him—the practice

of his profession. I feel but half a man in the midst of all this grandeur of hill and stream and valley—for it is a grand old property!—and I wish to heaven I could fling aside the burden of a title and take up even a shovel where there is no ‘noblesse oblige’ but the natural laws of God!”

Yet, with such a delightful scene as spread everywhere before him, a man could hardly wish for wider prospects, for a fuller life.

But ruined abbeys in the distance, and picturesque cottages dotting the roadsides, bordered with lovely wild-flowers of every hue though they were—masses of gold and violet and tender blue—did not appeal so much to Hugh as the more unconventional land of Australia.

On one pretext and another, the chief being her own health, which she insisted was worse than the doctors could be brought to say, his mother had contrived to delay his departure. Hence the letter written on impulse to Laurence Hayes.

Isabel, too, had whispered confidentially that she was certain “dear Mrs. Lowenthal” was in as weak a state as she fancied, and it might not be advisable for him to go so far away at present.

However, Larry’s letter was undoing by degrees all that had been so carefully built up by the two ladies, and Hugh now saw nothing for it but to chance the journey and set his doubts at rest.

“Old Dr. Barrowclough wouldn’t deceive me as to the state of my mother’s heart, I am certain. In

his good care she will be all right. I need not be away long, whichever way the tide turns for me."

He fell to dreaming, while "The Corsair" munched on contentedly. This black beauty was by this time quite accustomed to his master's vagaries. There was far more pleasure for him in the lack of knowledge as to where he was to be taken, when to be stopped, when to be allowed to fly his fleetest, when to be gradually "slowed down."

And as Sir Hugh Lowenthal was lost to the pretty English landscape round about him, so did he become again the quiet boarder at Sebastien's. Over and over again he lived the happiest moments of his life while Isabel watched in vain "from her turret window." "The Lady Lenora was left forlorn" while "The Boy-Blue" of fancy "wound his horn." Perhaps she was to be pitied, too!

"To doubt her fairness were to want an eye,
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart—
Yea, to be loved, if what is worthy love
Could bind him, but free Love will not be bound."

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Another letter went to Dr. Hayes that week—a letter written in the loneliest fern-hollow of Poppledene with a fountain pen, and, for the first time in his life, Hugh Lowenthal "wrote himself" down as he really was, employing no subterfuge to hide his feelings, but baring his heart and soul to this man, whom in his heart of hearts he really loved as a brother.

It was because of this that Larry's letter had stung so much. It was because of this that he feared Larry as a rival, should Corinne be alive and unwed. But he did not, this time, allow any feeling of jealousy to actuate him. "You must leave all to her, as I shall leave it," he wrote. "This dear woman whom we both love, shall she not have grace to choose according to her own heart's desire? And when she has chosen, shall we be so graceless as to hate each other? No, Larry, for we are friends and comrades still, and must always be, or there is no truth in man."

Having despatched the long and eloquently-written vindication of his acts since he had last seen Corinne, Hugh felt more satisfied, but that feeling of satisfaction did not prevent him from getting secretly ready for his voyage. "There shall not be the long-drawn-out preparations womenfolk delight in," he decided; "my announcement and my good-byes shall speedily follow each other, and mother will make the best of things, as, thank goodness, no one has a greater power of doing, when required."

Hugh was both proud and fond of his mother, but a stronger love yet was calling him across the seas.

Larry received the letter one evening, after a particularly happy hour spent in talking to Corinne, whom he had accidentally met in the little township, and he dragged at his brown moustache disconsolately as he saw he was no better off than before, but

placed again "on his honour" with not only a firm, but a loving, hand.

In one sense pleased and gratified at Lowenthal's sudden but evidently earnest avowal of affection, in another he was sorely driven.

"I'm not one of those conceited asses who believe when a woman's nice to them that she must needs be 'in love' with them, but, upon my soul, I believe I could coax her into caring enough for me to marry me—if the 'other fellow' was out of the road, and we saw more of each other. It's a temptation, all right! And, the worst of it is, the dev'l at present whispering in my ear seems to have all the reason on his side; the angel has sentiment and honour alone. Well, Larry, my boy, you've got a chance now to prove whether you've got grit or gruel-water! You've got to steer carefully for honour's sake, and you've got to nip your feelings in the bud for sentiment's sake, and you've got to go gently and suppress yourself for loyalty's sake; so Heaven only knows what is to become of you, poor wretched omadhaun that you are!

"There's positively nothing to keep the heart beating warmly in you but one little sentence from the sweet lips that you adore, and that is your own little colleen of dreams saying so fervently but twenty minutes ago: 'I shall never marry a Protestant.' Little she knew—the creature—that 'twas the sweetest music she could have sung or said in the ears of me! Is it disloyalty to a friend to own it? I think not, mine absent comrade. It'll be the last

bit of disloyalty to you you'll have to complain of; but, oh, 'twill go hard with me, avick, if I have to stand by and see you marching off with her!

"He 'will soon be on his way out.' Well, that's a little better, anyway. There's nothing like having a trouble over quickly, if there has to be one.

"If he wrote all he said he did to Corinne, and she never received it, I'll bet the solemn Jimmy is at the bottom of it! Give a man a motive, and he'll be capable of anything. Jimmy had the 'motive,' all right, so I shall never rest now till I tackle him. I'll frighten the wits out of his Funereal Highness by saying I'll report the theft of the ring—that is, if I don't find it where Lowenthal says he hid it. If Jimmy kept back the letter and read it, then it follows, as a matter of course, that Jimmy unearthed the ring. He'd be a fool if he didn't, having entered on a villainous course, I suppose. If he took it, he wouldn't sell it; he has it still. I'll say nothing to Corinne till I run Jimmy to earth. The mere thought of it is exciting, after eighteen months of this monotonous life!"

He put Lowenthal's letter away carefully, and sat for an hour buried in thought. Many problems faced him, but he was not afraid of them. "Fighting Larry" the boys had called him in his college days, and he would fight out this affair till something clearly understandable should come of it.

While he was thinking, Mr. James Barr, jun., was leisurely getting out of the coach, and making inquiries as to where he could be comfortably

accommodated for a night or two, so true is it that "truth is stranger than fiction"!

"Nurse Cora" would have slept ill that night, after her weekly one-day's outing, if she had known of Jim's nearness. As it was, she slept the refreshing sleep of the good and healthy, and her dreams were only of the far sea-shore, where the waves came tumbling in with joyous glee, and the sun was shining, shining, and her father's voice was calling, "Corinne, Corinne! Come, little one; thy brother waits for thee and thy shells."

CHAPTER XII.

A ROAD ENCOUNTER.

“When Adam delved, and Eve span,
Where was then the gentleman?”

“Martin McNally is here, sir, and wants to know if you’d like him to drive you in his own turn-out to-day, an’ give your own hard-worked beasts a rest—time they had it, too, poor varmint!—as he’s going up to Sannytorum this mornin’ himself, an’ it your day.”

“Tell Martin I’ll be with him in a crack of the whip. As you say, Martha, the poor beasts want a day off.”

“An’ so does their master, too!” Martha grumbled, as she hobbled off again. “I never see the like of it in all my born days! It’s ‘Dr. Hayes here,’ and ‘Dr. Hayes there,’ an’ a tooth out in between, an’ a broken leg arrivin’ just when a body wants a bit of sleep, an’ some fool of a girl between-times that has got the hy-strikes for want of her mother givin’ her a real good wallopin’. I’m glad he chased the last miss round and round the dinin’-room table while she was yelling blue murder all

the while, an' ended her up by a jug o' cold water! She won't take hy-strikes again in a hurry, I'll warrant! It isn't every good-lookin' doctor has so much common sense. I can see the twinklin' eye of him yet, an' the girl thinkin' he was gone clean mad! I burned the scones enjoyin' it, but he never knows what he eats, bless him. There never was a gentleman easier to cook for."

Laurence set off with Martin in high good-humour. It was a fine day, and—Corinne at the end of his journey!

Martin was a companion he liked, for he knew both how to make a joke and how to enjoy one; and the McNallys and family were always kind and hospitable, without forgetting when and where to lay bounds in the familiarity born of constant association in a bush township.

The buggy rattled gaily along in great style, and the level portion of the road was soon covered, and the up-hill loomed in sight—dark, precipitous.

A rider had been in their rear for some time, and, at last, as Martin slackened the reins, he came fully into sight.

"Not from Musktown, that chap?" remarked young McNally. "I saw him get off the coach last night. Must have business at the hospital, too!"

The doctor leaned forward and looked; there was something strangely familiar in the figure of the man, who now was preparing to go as slowly up the ascent as they were.

In a flash, recognition dawned upon him. It was Jim Barr, of Corral's Bluff.

Fury filled Larry—fury and indignation, as well as a sense of coming battle, that made every nerve in his body tingle.

The enemy was given into his hands!

He jumped out of the vehicle, saying to Martin, "I'll have pity on your grand little mare, and walk up the hill. I think I know the young man on the horse, and we'll keep each other company."

He hurried on, and called, "Barr! Coo-ee there!"

Barr halted, and gazed in surprise at the figure hastening towards him—not too pleased, but still preserving his usual stolidity.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Hayes? Didn't know that you lived up in this part."

"I'm 'part' of it now," said the doctor, "and am just on my way to visit my patients at 'Moritza.' Do you know anyone at the Sanatorium—know you must be going up there, of course, unless you mean to get lost in the ranges?"

"I know one of the nurses," Jim said, shortly, and began to make comments on the state of the road, to turn the subject.

But Hayes wished to make hay while the sun shone; so, when Jim had dismounted, and the two were walking up the hill together, Martin keeping a discreet distance behind, and scenting, also, "something wrong," he brought Barr back to the point by saying quietly, "It is, of course, Miss Cour-

boules whom you are going to see; she has not been here long, but seems to like the wilds very well."

Jim did not commit himself by more than a grunt or a "Yes," but the doctor talked on till a curve—"McCracken's Elbow"—hid him and his unwilling companion from Martin's view.

Then, his face growing pale and set, and his eyes full of a dangerous fire, he suddenly laid his hand with a compelling grip on Barr's arm, and looked straight at him and through him.

"A friend of mine, Mr. Barr, has empowered me to settle a little account you owe him. It would be to your advantage were it done here, and now!"

The young man started, first in utter amazement, then with a dangerous look settling on his thick, dark brows.

"I owe no man anything; and, if I did, I should certainly not account for it to you!"

There was a sneer in the tone which was not lost upon Hayes, and told him in as many words that he "would have the deil to fight with" before he wrung a confession out of Mr. Jim Barr.

He squared his jaw, too.

"There is something which you owe, however, and it is of value enough, my friend, to put you between four very unpleasant walls. Where is the ring you stole, Mr. James Barr, from the cavity in the Sword Rock—a ring which is the property of Sir Hugh Lowenthal, now on his way out to claim it?"

At the mention of the word "ring," Barr's colour changed to a sickly yellow, and his jaw dropped; but he soon regained his self-possession.

"I don't know your high-and-mighty friend, Sir Hugh Lowenthal!" he sneered, "and I have certainly never stolen a ring of his. What, man, do you take me for—a common thief?"

Barr approached Hayes menacingly, as a perfectly honest man might have done under the circumstances, but Larry only glared back at him contemptuously.

"You may not wish yourself to be called by the name you try to put on my lips, Barr, but if you say that you don't know Sir Hugh Lowenthal—or, rather, who he is, you lie!"

Barr drew his breath hard, and his features worked convulsively.

"You are the first man who has called me liar, Dr. Hayes—I suppose Hayes is your real name?—and but that you are a friend of the young lady I am going to call upon to-day, you'd measure your length before me!"

"You shall measure yours," said Larry, between his teeth, "if you dare to annoy that lady, either now or in the future, with your persistent and unwelcome attentions—ay, unwelcome! No man with a spark of common manliness in him would thus thrust them upon her!"

Barr did not lose his coolness.

"At least," he said, with a snarl, returning Larry's look with interest, "I am not a low-down profligate like Mr. Hugh Allingham, who was ashamed to let his high-class friends know what a pretty pastime he was having in breaking a poor innocent country girl's heart! I am an honest lover, Dr. Hayes, and, as such, have every right to honestly court any woman I care for."

Had it not been for the theft of the ring and the letter, and the incalculable mischief thereby worked, Hayes would have ungrudgingly admired the young fellow's stand. As it was, he had but one aim—to set matters right somehow, and as quickly as he could.

"I do not question your motive in visiting my friend," he answered, accenting the two last words, "but I demand again, with every right, the ring which, it is my firm belief, you have upon you this very moment! If you do not restore it, I shall accuse you before this man now coming into sight of the theft of it, and, if needs be, bring Miss Courboules into the case, too! There is but one other alternative," he said, meditatively, never taking his eyes off Barr, though he heard Martin singing lustily close at hand, and nearly upon them—"one other—and that is for you to restore it to Miss Courboules in my presence, this day, and go your way free forever."

Barr's fingers had been working in and out convulsively while the doctor was speaking, and it

would have gone hard with Hayes but for the appearance of the cheerful, ruddy-faced Martin.

The two men were still facing each other, each grim-faced, determined-looking, deeply in earnest.

Martin looked at the doctor, and winked meaningly, to show his readiness if his strong arm were needed.

Slowly, however, very slowly, Barr's features relaxed, when the silence had begun to get on each man's nerves, and going up to his horse, and throwing his leg over it, he said, with a gruffness born of the hoarseness of rage, "I accept the last-named, and be d—— to you!"

In a moment he was out of sight on the mountain road, and Larry climbed into the trap, not knowing whether he had altogether bungled matters and let the fellow escape by some way unknown to him, or to congratulate himself on having brought matters to a successful issue.

Barr was not a coward, he knew; then why did he give in so tamely?

"Drive your hardest," he said to McNally. "I want to be at 'Moritza' as soon as that man."

"We can't do it," said Martin, regretfully. "That chap knows how to ride, and he'll be at the avenue gates before we're up the last hill. Queer customer, ain't he?"

"He is," said Hayes, "and I don't want to lose sight of him. Keep your eyes about, Mat, and—keep your own counsel,"

"Right you are, sir," said Martin. Nothing surprised him. He had seen too many "queer customers" in the ranges, and known of too many "queer" incidents, to feel aggrieved at being "left out of it" for once.

"I'll bet that pretty nurse is in it," he thought, as he whipped up his horses and flew on.

Barr was at the Sanatorium before them, as McNally had predicted, and the doctor watched him disappear round one side of the building as he drove up, as usual, to the front door. He determined that if fortune didn't favour him in the seeing of Nurse Cora on his entrance, he would ask for her, whatever Miss Dunraven thought.

But good luck was for him, and she was one of the first nurses on duty that he saw as he entered.

He made a pretext of taking her aside a moment, and told her Barr was probably in the reception-room, and to arrange matters so that he could be present when she went in to see him.

"Say he wishes to see me too—anything!" he enjoined, and went on his rounds as calmly, to all appearance, as usual.

Corinne, meanwhile, was making a desperate effort to exercise all the self-control she had ever had at command in a trying life, and when a messenger came for her, and she was granted the usual grudging permission "to see an old friend for a few moments," she was herself again.

She went towards the door of the room, then turned back, and, seizing a maid who was passing,

sent a message across to the doctor that "an old friend of his was awaiting him in there."

She waited in the shadow of the corridor till she heard his quick footstep, and then turned the handle of the door and walked slowly in.

Jim advanced, with less ease in his manner than he had shown at any other time, and the difference in his demeanour comforted and strengthened her a little.

"How do you do, Mr. Barr?" she asked coldly, giving him a limp hand.

He looked reproachfully at her for her use of the more formal title.

"Corinne—Miss Courboules!" he stammered, looking sheepish, but not to be dreaded.

There was a light tap at the door, and Dr. Hayes entered.

Barr at once threw his shoulders back, and was a changed man.

Corinne gazed at his blazing eyes in terror she could hardly control. What did these two men want with each other? She was not a child, to be so openly guarded by Laurence Hayes!

"You desire me to remain, Nurse Cora?" the doctor inquired, suavely.

"I do," she said, audibly enough for Barr to hear.

Hayes took a seat, but Barr remained standing. Corinne had sunk on to a couch.

"Mr. Barr has something to tell you, Miss Courboules—something to confess in my presence, strange as it may seem. He has promised, and"—by a happy thought—"he is a man of his word."

He turned courteously towards Barr.

The young man seemed to swallow hard for a few moments, then he suddenly walked across to where Corinne was sitting, and stood in front of her, all his anger melting into an expression of tender pleading.

"Corinne, for the sake of the days when we were boy and girl together, tell me have you given this man they call doctor here any right to stand between you and me?—any right to ask that I should render an account to him for whatever wrong I may have done you? Is my patient love for you, my girl, of no avail, after all? Do you turn from an old country friend because he is rough, and uncouth, and ill-mannered, for the sake of a polished gentleman like one you knew once, and who—treated you like the cursed scoundrel that he is?"

His voice, from rising and falling with all the modulations of a genuine passion, now sank to hissing fierceness; but he never altered his attitude.

Corinne had half risen, and was clasping and unclasping her hands.

"By Heaven, this is too much," said the doctor, rising and drawing nearer. "It is you who are the scoundrel! Are you waiting for me to unmask you, that you treat us to this piece of melodrama?"

Corinne looked at him imploringly, evidently desiring that he should hold his peace—for the present, at any rate.

“Jim!” she answered Barr gently, “I have always told you that I never could love you in return! It is truer now than even at first. Oh, why do you not believe me?”

Barr threw up one hand, as if in despair.

“I cannot believe that you will never care, dear little sweetheart!—yes, I must call you that, once!—only this once! I cannot believe that it is all wasted—the long, long years I have loved you; the dear old days when one who is gone would have given you to me gladly, gladly. And why, Corinne? Answer me that, my girl. Because he could trust me, because he knew I would guard your life with my own—proud to die, that you might live!”

Corinne was weeping softly now, and Larry had turned away. This man’s love was genuine. Who was he that he should presume to judge him?—to even be here listening to him?

Barr’s voice went on, more quietly than before: “I care nothing for the threats of this man beside me—nothing, nothing! But I care for this—and the answer will be more than life to me. Have you given him a right—a right”—the word came from him like a groan, and his chest heaved—“to consider himself your protector—the right which is that only of a future husband?”

He grasped at the table with his lean, brown hand, that trembled, and the intake of his breathing could be distinctly heard in the tense silence that now reigned.

So this had been what was working in Barr's mind as he gave the promise which had appeared so easily reft from a conscience-stricken man! Hayes saw it all now, and the hot blood surged up into his face.

Corinne, Corinne—what would her answer be! Were ever two placed in such a difficult position? "Yes," and she would probably be rid of Barr for ever. "Yes," and, oh, the joy that he might hope to win her from the cruel memories of the past!

He looked at Corinne, whose eyes, wide open, and dazed in expression, were fixed upon his face; and into that one look he put all the deep, hidden love of his fast-beating heart.

"Say 'Yes!' Say 'Yes!' those tenderly-passionate eyes commanded her; and, like one under mesmeric influence, her lips formed the syllable both men's ears were striving to hear aright.

"Yes!" Mechanically she said it; but it was clear enough. "Yes!"

Barr made an inarticulate sound that smote the doctor's happy heart with pity; and then, suddenly wheeling round, he walked over towards the window on the opposite side of the room.

Neither Corinne nor Hayes moved. More genuine feeling for Barr was in that deep silence than ever

he had been fortunate to gain from anyone in the course of his life.

Presently his hand went quickly to his breast-pocket.

Corinne looked at Hayes with a new terror in her eyes.

He moved a step forward, but Barr was only holding a small parcel in his hand—too small to be a weapon of any sort—and the doctor guessed intuitively it was the ring, and a feeling of foreboding crept over him. For the time, he had forgotten loyalty to Lowenthal!

Barr crossed over again to Corinne, and put the packet between her trembling fingers. Then Hayes saw that doubled up around what he presumed to be the casket was a letter. Perhaps he might be “in the same boat” with Barr yet; and, after all, was not Corinne justified in saying “Yes” to any question under such an ordeal as he had unwittingly subjected her to?

As in a dream, he heard the young man’s voice monotonously telling the story of his treachery; as in a dream, he heard Corinne sob her forgiveness; as in a dream, he saw Barr kiss her hands, one after the other, no less tenderly than he would have done himself, and pass from the room, and out of their lives for ever!

CHAPTER XIII.

BETWIXT AND BETWEEN.

"Oh, a king would have loved and left thee,
And away thy sweet love cast,
But I am thine while the stars shall shine,
To the last, to the last!"

Dr. Hayes bent tenderly over Corinne, whose face was deathly white now, her arms hanging limply by her side, and her teeth chattering as if with cold.

"Poor little girl, this has been too much for you! You are upset and unnerved; and no wonder. I did not dream I was letting you in for such a trying scene! We will not discuss it till—till you have time during the day to read that letter," pointing to where both it and the casket lay, apparently unnoticed, on her lap. "Rouse yourself, dear, or it will excite comment. Each of us to duty now—and with God be the rest!"

He assisted Corinne to rise, putting the packet and letter in her hand significantly. She secreted them upon her person, and followed him to the open door, but did not look at him. Once in the corridor again, a painful red chased the pallor of her face for a moment, and she half whispered:

"You understand? You will not think ill of me? Oh, poor old Jim! Poor Jim!"

"I understand perfectly," Larry said. "You simply meant you gave me 'the right' to act for my friend, Hugh Lowenthal. And I want you to understand that no word forced from you under such circumstances will be taken advantage of by me. You are so dear to me, Corinne, that I would rather walk in wretched loneliness all my days than that you should have made a mistake, and given up, in pity for me, what you will soon know has always been yours, and is still yours—Hugh's unchanged devotedness! There is much to explain, for his sake; and I will do it as soon as we get an opportunity of meeting otherwise, which may not be for a few days. Write, if you think there is anything you would like to say."

With a pressure of the hand, he left her, and went outside, on his way to the tents of the unfortunate consumptives, whose only ray of brightness for the day was in his cheery word or joke, and sympathetic smile.

The bodily sufferings of these poor creatures, shown in their wan, worn faces and hollow eyes, made mental pain seem a very unworthy second; and none noticed that the popular doctor's manner was less bright than usual, save one old Irish gentleman, who had come a long distance that day in order to see his suffering daughter—a lovely girl who had been the light of her home till the dread disease had stricken her.

"Sure, 'tis he wants the word of comfort himself, I'm thinking, Mary; he's the grand man and

the kind, but there are tears in his own heart, for all that. There's just something not going right with him, I'll go bail."

"They nearly worship him here," said Mary, with the weirdly bright smile of those who are consumption's early victims. "Dr. Johannsen is quite jealous of him! Dr. Hayes sees we're looked after properly. Nurse Benton is as hard as stone, and wouldn't give you a drink if it was any trouble to herself to get it; but he's making a real Christian of her, and she's not half bad now. We used to simply hate the sound of her step! We like Nurse Cora, the new one. She's gentle and kind, and never seems to think anything a trouble; she's just lovely to me when I get the home-sickness."

The "home-sickness!" God help them, poor souls; the "home-sickness" was often more than their tried hearts could bear! Bodily pains were forgotten in that great and terrible hunger. To have to die there was a fate none faced with equanimity. Only to get home before the last!—that was their constant prayer, their craving, their yearning. Home to God, if God willed it, but home to those they loved first!

The scenery around "Moritza" was magnificent in its grandeur, but scenery, however beautiful, soon palls on the most beauty-loving when away from parents, brothers, sisters, friends. The world is still worldly in these institutions; and the wealthier the patient, or the patient's "people," the more the attention lavished.

Dr. Hayes combated this tendency with all his might, and ensured, as far as possible, the kindest of treatment to all. But, in spite of his strict watch and ward, many abuses went on that should never have been allowed, nor encouraged, by the matron in charge.

Dr. Johannsen cared little as long as he "made money." He persuaded people in the outlying districts to send those belonging to them who showed any lung weakness "up to 'Moritza,' up to the fresh air and fresh milk cure," which was, at first, only to cost a moderate sum, but which soon sucked up the hard-earned money of farmer and "cockatoo."

Once they were there, it was the greatest difficulty in the world to have them brought home again. Reports were regularly sent of their gradual improvement, and it came as an overwhelming shock when news had, perforce, to be sent, at last, that death was imminent.

For every three that recovered at "Moritza," two died. Miss Dunraven had a particular aversion to having deaths occur in the Home itself—"it looked so bad!" So, many an unfortunate was sent back in time to free her from what she called "that horrid bother," and reached their destination over rough roads, only to breathe out their gasping life in a few weeks, while she complacently placed another large sum of money to the credit of her banking account. All nurses are not "ministering angels"!

"To be a good nurse," Dr. Hayes taught, "a girl needs the constitution of an ox and the heart of an

archangel." It is a hard standard to attain, for erring mortals—the latter part—but who shall say it is unnecessary?

Laurence Hayes loved his profession because he had a heart that was brimful of sympathy for pain, with a corresponding desire to alleviate it. No one of the large human family was common or unworthy in his eyes, and the humblest and poorest woman placed her baby confidingly and gladly in his kindly arms, or trusted herself, with all her aches and miseries and coming trial, to his conscientious care.

It was always, "Never mind the money, let me see to the trouble first;" and Larry was becoming fast as great an idol in their eyes as the rougher, if heroic-hearted, old doctor who lay in his grave on the hillside, with a granite monument above him, which did its best to tell that it was erected by a grateful people to the undying memory of "one who had never spared himself when anguish called."

Corinne learned daily with growing pride and pleasure of the esteem and regard in which Dr. Hayes was held, but why she "had done such a dreadful and unmaidenly thing" as to answer James Barr's momentous question in the affirmative, she could not in any degree imagine!

The recollection made her blush painfully and frequently in the privacy of her dormitory, the only explanation being that, as her own will had, through shock, lain dormant, she had, half-unconsciously, obeyed the strong will of a man whom she liked, trusted utterly, and looked up to as defender and protector. She had lost courage, and become an

automaton. She had seen, for some time, Hayes' growing love for her, and something in her had responded. Was she becoming fickle—false to the memory of the man to whom she had given her heart years ago on the rocks of the dear old Bluff? Surely not! She was still Hugh's affianced wife.

She covered her face with her hands, and scalding tears trickled through her fingers.

Against her breast pressed the letter which once would have brought untold happiness—a very delirium of joy. She was not without some degree of the happiness now. It was very sweet to know, after all she had suffered, that Hugh had been true—that he was still true, and would be soon coming to claim her. Whatever explanations Dr. Hayes had promised, nothing could do away with that certainty!

But she would rather run miles away than face Larry again, after her foolish slip in speech! Perhaps she was mistaken in thinking that he loved her; his words of tender devotion might have only been prompted by the kindly courtesy and sense of honour which forbids that a woman should suffer while a man can bear pain for her. Of this, at least, she was sure, that Laurence Hayes' character was noble, self-sacrificing, and loyal.

Had Hugh changed? Was he still the same as when his loved and speaking eyes had last looked into hers? Had he ever regretted the penning of this letter, now stained with her tears, or wished that he had never left behind the token of their

secret betrothal? How was she to know? How was she to bear the dreary waiting till he would be face to face with her again, and she should see, in one glance, whether he was still the ideal of her fond girlish dreams?

And even if he were all that her heart cherished as a memory sweet and glorious, would not the difference in religion between them soon cast its cloud? She could not, would not, marry a Protestant; but how was she, with her limited knowledge, to bring about—even with Father Dalton's kindly help—his sincere conversion? Did she deserve the grace that alone could enable such a satisfactory state of things to be consummated?

Corinne found much to torture her mind and heart with during the next few days and nights. Hugh's letter was read and re-read, and pondered over incessantly; but, as fast as thoughts poured in in his favour, so did thoughts of Larry. The latter's face, with its manly, tender look, was as frequently before her as his friend's. Was it her fault, she asked, that Hugh's image had grown fainter through the years? God alone knew what agony of mind and heart had been hers after she had thought herself cruelly deserted. She had fought against her love, had prayed day and night that she might forget, and live only for her duty to God and the world. She had not forgotten; still, she had been given strength to live as religion taught her she should live—bravely, and not for herself, but for her kind. "Knowledge by suffering entereth," and she had learned very

bitter lessons! Life, even in the sunshine of Hugh's love as a husband, could never be quite the same for her again. Was it her fault? Dear angels of heaven, was it her fault?

While Corinne agonised in thought and emotion, Dr. Hayes was suffering none the less keenly. What would be the young girl's ultimate decision? It had cost him much to say the words which told her that he would forego his own hopes entirely for the sake of his absent friend, as for her own. No mean advantage taken by him should lessen Hugh's chances of recovering what Larry was beginning to see he had so nearly lost. The two lovers of old must meet face to face again; that was the only test left now. He hoped Lowenthal was well on his way out; delay was heart-sickening for both him and Corinne. He was not blind to the fact that he had made considerable inroads into the young girl's affections, so long starved, so long left in drear loneliness. Had Lowenthal never written and told all, had Barr never been forced to confess, he—Larry—and she might now be preparing for that great Sacrament which alone gives strength, and solidity, and grace to human love.

"Lowenthal will marry her in her own Church, all right; but, unless his whole opinions on religious matters have completely altered, he will never become a convert to the faith. 'Lady Lowenthal!'—much as I love my beautiful, clever Corinne, I can sooner associate Isabel Lascelles with that title!

Confound him, why didn't he take a liking to that stately Madame!"

Hugh was nearer Victoria than he thought.

Even now he was standing on the deck of a steamer bound for Melbourne, standing in the moonlight, gazing musingly before him, full of a deep and quiet happiness at the prospect of so soon seeing Australian shores—and the old French sailor's "petite Corinne." Time enough to wire Larry when he reached Melbourne. On his reply would hinge everything—maybe, his whole destiny.

Beautiful girls chattered within his hearing, and strove, in innocent, girlish way, to attract the attention of "the Grand Duke," as they had nicknamed him, because of his good looks and exclusiveness; but all in vain. His thoughts were on the shore of another sea; they were "outward-bound." Had the years brought changes to that lovely face, with the dreamy eyes as full of light and colour and changing expression as the sea, which had been her foster mother? Did the dimples still come and go where the silvery laughter trembled? Were the sweet, confiding, childish ways all gone?—the hundred and one little natural, graceful movements which had made her every attitude a beautiful and artistic thing? Most of all, had the loving, faithful, impulsive nature altered? He could not bear to hear that voice speak coldly, to see those once love-lit eyes turn indifferently away! Ah! but she should not, she could not!

Under his breath he sang softly to himself the song that had seemed peculiarly his own since he had repeated it to Corinne on that never-to-be-forgotten day, in the shade of the Sword Rock:

“I told thee when love was hopeless,
But now he is wild, and sings
That the stars above
Shine ever on love,
Though they frown on the fate of Kings.
“Oh, a king would have loved and left thee,
And away thy sweet love cast;
But I am thine
Whilst the stars shall shine,
To the last, to the last!”

His days were spent in dreams, while Larry's passed in hard work. Never before had there been so many calls on the young doctor. He gave Martha enough to grumble about that week and the following!

“Never a bite between his lips, nor a drop of spirits to put the strength into him! It's, ‘I don't know what time I'll be home, Martha; I may have to put up at a roadside shanty for the night, or in a Chinaman's hut.’ An', like enough, it's on stones he's lying, with only the rug over him, getting his death of cold, all for the sake of them Jenkinses, that have never a good word for him behind his back. Oh! don't talk to me about a doctor's life being a fine thing, and an easy billet, for I know better. Them as finds it so, just let them up with their tools and an old moke into the mountains, and rough it over hill and up dale, and see how they like it! An'

then the comin' home after a bad case twenty mile away in No Man's Land—comin' home in the winter, soaked through if they're ridin', an' frozen near to an iceberg if they're drivin'; comin' home to a bit of Irish stew and a cup of coffee; never a wife's smile to cheer, nor a child's to call 'Daddy.' I'm old and ugly, and not as strong as in my young days, an', when I've bustled off to my bed, who knows how the man eats his heart out, while he's smokin', smokin' till it's time to go out again? He ought to marry, I says; but, maybe, he has not money enough, poor man. 'Tis very few as comes in the door with a pound owin', I tell you. He wants a worker for a wife, does the doctor. Not that I've ever heard him say the like—but what good would a lady that spends the time playing the pianner an' dressin' her hair up be for him? With a wife like himself, the district soon wouldn't know itself; but where's the plucky, clever creature to come from? He never gives a look to no woman, though there's many I could mention, but won't, that's everlastin' settin' their giddy little caps at him!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RETURN OF SIR HUGH LOWENTHAL.

A few lines from Corinne had reached Laurence before the day due for his next visit to "Moritza" had arrived. It was a short letter, but the doctor guessed that many other, probably longer, epistles had been penned and destroyed before this one had been finally chosen.

"Dear Mr. Hayes," it ran, "I can wait for a fuller explanation of the past till I see Mr. Lowenthal in person; so, please, do not allude to it, Doctor, till then, unless there is some urgent reason for so doing. I can wait a little longer, as I have already waited so long. Thank you very much for all your goodness to your ever-grateful friend, CORINNE COURBOULES."

That was all!—a tame ending to all the excitement and stress of emotion each had been going through. Well, perhaps she was right, thought Laurence. Only Lowenthal could straighten matters out now. The sooner he did, the better. Till he came, Larry must just busy himself in his work. There was nothing left to do either for Corinne or Hugh. Corinne knew the state of his feelings for

her; the avowal had been made under different circumstances to that which a glowing Celtic fancy had so often pictured. But that couldn't be helped now. One had to take things as they came.

If Corinne found that her love for Lowenthal was as strong as of old, and he had to stand by and see their mutual happiness—well, he supposed, he'd "have to grin and bear it." It would be "jolly hard luck" to be but an onlooker, but other men had fought similar battles to what his might be, and had conquered.

He saw Corinne a few times while on duty, through the following weeks, but made no attempt to have a few minutes' private conversation with her. He felt that the understanding between them now was strong enough to bear an equal strain—as, indeed, it was.

Of the two, perhaps Corinne suffered the most. Every thought of Barr brought its stab of pain, because of her father's love for him and the tried friendship of years. She had heard nothing from or of him since that afternoon. And every thought of Lowenthal had its own peculiar sting. Thoughts of Larry were also fraught with a dull pain. "Why should she be the means of causing three good men misery?" she often questioned of herself, and, at times, longed to "flee away and be at rest" where there was but the Love which healeth. Human love brought pain and sorrow, and endless travail of heart and soul. If, she thought, when more than usually depressed, she had chosen the religious life,

how much more at peace would her mind be now! Oh! but to be with Antoine and her mother! Safe on the Heart of God!

A great longing for the sea was upon her these days. Like those who, born upon the hills, can think best in the wind's breath on the hills, she, who had been born amid the surges, and lived within hearing of the myriad voices of the sea, felt she could better wrestle with the coming problem that disturbed her soul in sight of the waters she would never cease to love.

"I would know myself there," she thought. "I would be better able to see what I should do; and, oh! if I could only hear Hugh's voice again where I so often listened to it, with the old sweet gladness that seems gone forever, I might be able to re-cross the chasm these silent years have made!"

Yes, there was the trouble she did not dare to face—the chasm the years had dug between her and the man who, with an exultant heart, was, doubtless, on his way to claim the promise given so willingly and joyfully "when the heart was young!"

She did not know that Hugh had already succeeded to his uncle's estates. Her hope was that he would now settle in Australia, and that, if their lives were at last united in matrimony, they would lead some peaceful, ordinary existence not too far from the coast.

At length, the longing of the poor "sea-bird" expressed itself in a petition to Miss Dunraven for a week's holiday and rest; and, seeing that the girl

was rapidly growing pale and thin, and not being willing to lose her valuable services, the matron put on a motherly air, which she could assume at will, and consented to allow her a respite.

"But why you want to spend your strength on a long journey to town, when only in need of a few days' lying about in comfort, I cannot imagine," she commented, eyeing the girl suspiciously.

Nurse Cora laughed nervously.

"I'm afraid you'll think me very childish, Matron, but, truth to tell, I am burning with the desire to taste the salt sea water, and feel the cold sea winds upon my face, and hear the cries of the free sea-gulls in my ears."

"Humph!" responded Miss Dunraven; "it is to be hoped you won't also be seized with a craving to go to sleep on the cold sea's breast, as well!"

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So, one morning when Larry arrived at "Moritza," he was told that Nurse Cora had gone—and gone somewhere seawards. He was alarmed at the news, for he had seen that the young girl's nerves were "playing up with her" of late, and he had been contemplating advising Miss Dunraven to give her a few weeks' outdoor work, in order that the fresh air and change of patients might effect a natural cure.

Surely Corinne had not returned to Corral's Bluff! Why, young Barr was the manager of her old home, and all his work in assisting her to get rid

of his importunities would, in such an event, be of no avail!

Poor Larry felt that women were very hard to understand—even the best of them!

Why on earth hadn't she let him—Larry—know in some way? Surely he deserved that bit of thoughtfulness at her hands?

Ten days only the matron had given her; but a great deal could happen in ten days.

He racked his brain to think of what the name of the little coast village was where the father and daughter had resided last, but could not recollect it. He looked carefully through his maps, but insignificant places had been omitted from the plan.

Then he suddenly remembered that Rosalie Coudray, the young girl who had once been such an active assistant of Corinne's at the Bluff, used to write with monthly regularity to Corinne from Shellbeach, a well-known place at many miles' distance from the Bluff, or even from the Courboules' later home, and that it was but natural the poor girl should long to greet again such people as would feel honoured by her remembrance of them, and let her rest where she pleased without question.

Still, it was risky to go in the direction of the Bluff at all!

His surmise as to Corinne's whereabouts was correct. She had flown to her faithful Rosalie's family as fast as train and boat could carry her, and eventually reached them in such a state of weariness

ness of body and of nerve as filled their kind and homely hearts with dismay and pity.

Mrs. Coudray, a bustling, cheerful woman, of French extraction, "fed her up" with broths and nourishing foods, and made her spend her days lying covered up comfortably in an old boat in the sun, on the sea-shore, where the waves sang again for her tired brain and heart the old sweet lullaby that never had failed to soothe.

"The sea is glad to have you back again, lass," old Coudray said, as he mended his nets, "so bask yourself in the warmth, and listen to its music."

Corinne did so very thankfully, and the sea repaid her for her love of its beauty and its songs by bringing back the roses to her cheeks and the rays of hope to her eyes. It was the change she had most needed—this rest by the sea—and its effects seemed miraculous.

All that had jarred and jangled was replaced by harmony; peace returned, and all her lips had now to say were, "God's will, not mine, be done. If Hugh claims me, even if I have lost some of the love I had in such shining heaps of love's own priceless gold for him, I shall not turn from him. My word is my bond, and I must keep it. But one thing remains after that; and that is, to do all that is in my power to lead him into the one true fold."

A quiet tear or two fell often, as she thought of Larry.

"But he is a good and unselfish man; a sincere Catholic, and a practical one; he will do his duty, as

I, with the help of God, shall do mine, and, as he said, 'the rest is with God.'

While she was thus communing with herself one glorious afternoon, when the sea was a thing of beauty, that seemed as if it must last forever, Laurence Hayes was reading a telegram that had just been given him: "Arrived to-day. Wire where meet. Let know any news immediately."

A half-hour later a message flashed back across the wires in answer: "She is at Shellbeach. People named Coudray. Prepare her beforehand. Down myself on Saturday."

This was Thursday.

That evening Corinne received a wire also:—

"Looking forward to our meeting to-morrow. Hope to find you on the beach near our friends' home, about three o'clock.—HUGH."

Now that her lover had actually returned, the news came as something of a shock, causing emotions not alone of pleasure, but of vague fear and uneasiness. Corinne spent half the night on her knees, and, at morn, was calm and recollected in demeanour, no wild beating of the heart signalling the coming of one beloved.

"You look like a nun to-day, somehow, Miss Corinne," said Rosalie. "If you had the habit on, and the rosary beads and crucifix, nobody would know different!"

Perhaps Corinne wished she had, for she only sighed deeply in answer, and passed her hand over the girl's crisp brown curls.

The first part of the day was got through somehow, the midday meal hurried over, and, after assisting in the "straightening up" of the household, Corinne went out to meet the man who held her destiny between his hands.

When at last they stood face to face, and he had drawn her to his heart, with an ardour all the more passionate for the long starving of the empty years, she knew the truth—the truth, at any rate, as concerned herself.

Alas! he was the same handsome, knightly-looking "Hugh Allingham" of old, as tender a lover, as loyal; but she—oh! what had happened to her woman's heart that it could not thrill at his touch, as in the happy, happy days of yore?

He did not notice the want of fervency in her affectionate welcome, so great was his joy at recovering her, whom he found to be more beautiful still than he had pictured her—more beautiful, with a woman's ripe loveliness; more beautiful in a face of such expression as artists give their pictured saints; more beautiful in a virginal modesty which, restraining, still drew the more deeply from the treasury of his man's worshipping love.

Hugh's was the voice that murmured with the sea that day; there was so much to tell, so much to explain, so much to paint of what the future held of bliss for both!

Corinne listened silently, starting when he told her of his title and his magnificent estates across the sea—starting, ay, and shivering, too! No "Lady

of Burleigh" did she desire to be!—no queen over tenants bound by expediency to do her homage. Her tastes were simple, her desire to work with the workers who offered up weariness of body to God as a continual prayer.

But Hugh was satisfied. To him that afternoon was as a gem of wondrous value shrined in gold.

He told Corinne that Larry was "coming down from the back-blocks" to join in their happiness, and, as he told her, he put on her finger, with all a lover's glowing pride, the ring which she had hastened to restore to him.

The cold light of its diamonds seemed to the poor, half-distraught girl to mock her hidden agony, and on its pearls, could he have had eyes to see the invisible, fell the slow tears that cruel torture brings.

Bound, bound, bound! The waters of the sea boomed the word in on her brain. Yes, she was bound; she could not break of herself the ancient vow of fealty. She could not bring unexpected anguish to this loyal lover's trusting heart. She must "dree her weird," somehow, somehow!

Hugh stayed at the only place of accommodation Shellbeach afforded, and waited for his old friend Larry with all the impatience born of the joyous desire to tell his love tale's "happy conclusion"; and the doctor arrived on the Saturday night, and listened to it as many a one has to sit calmly and listen to what stings, and stabs, and slashes the heart, the while is given the sympathetic words

which are expected, the sympathetic looks which lengthen the time of torture.

Naturally, Larry thought that Corinne had found, in the first glimpse of Hugh's face, the love returning in a flood, which had so long been pent back by strength of will, and that he was forgotten wholly, or put back in the second place, which had been his at the beginning of the romance, and he would have avoided seeing her on the Sunday if he could; but Hugh, blind to all but his own feelings, would not hear of his returning without spending most of the day with them, and he was obliged to face the ordeal.

During those hours spent together on the sand, as little as possible did Corinne's and Larry's eyes meet, but the latter could not but notice that there was something missing from laugh and tone in the sweet laughter and soft tones he knew now so well.

Hugh was happy—almost foolishly happy—but what was the matter with Corinne?

That was the problem Dr. Hayes carried back with him to his daily grind upon the ranges.

In two months the pair were to be married. Corinne would not give in to a shortening of the time, and Hugh gave as confidential reason that it was she wished him to be more acquainted with the Catholic faith.

"I'll humour my darling, of course," he said, "and go anywhere, and through anything, she likes, to please her; but there's very little religion in me, as you know, and I don't really care a hang what

creed I belong to. I believe there is a God, and all that, and that this life isn't all, and I try to do as I would be done by—especially of late, since I've gone more among those poor beggars of tenants at Poppledene; but to be all Corinne's faith would ask of me is entirely beyond me!"

Larry knew this to be the truth, and speculated much as to its probable effect on "Lady Lowenthal's" future.

"The old Countess will go 'off her head,'" he thought, "if he 'turns,' and poor Corinne will have a terrible time of it."

Poor Corinne was having "a terrible time" as it was, but he was not to know that.

Larry had one letter from her, in which she told him that Hugh always went to Mass with her, and was reading the books Father Dalton had given her for his perusal. She asked for his prayers for his friend's conversion, and that he would join her in a novena for the same purpose; and he wrote at considerable length back to her, assuring her of his active co-operation in her spiritual work, and telling her how much she was missed up at "Moritza," and how indignant Miss Dunraven had been when informed of her engagement and approaching marriage with an English lord. He omitted the matron's sarcastic comments on the fact, but knew that Corinne could easily imagine them, as also the excitement the news must have caused among both nurses and patients at "Moritza."

So both the young girl and the man whom she had found she truly loved with a woman's one abiding devotion did their duty day by day, alone and with all their might, in sight of God and man; and there was nothing to indicate that anything but duty's thorny path would be theirs to tread for the rest of their natural lives, till a week before the wedding, when something happened which changed the course of the lives of all.

Mrs. Lowenthal had been found dead in bed one morning by Isabel Lascelles, and the cable which brought the tidings of his unlooked-for bereavement to Sir Hugh filled him with such sorrow and remorse that it took all Corinne's affectionate attention to calm him and restrain its flow. He had truly loved his mother, and had never dreamed that the heart attacks of which she so often complained had been anything to cause alarm. Besides, he had been assured by the family physician that he might take this journey to Australia without fear of his mother's health giving way utterly. It caused him poignant grief that he had not been by to bid her a last farewell.

He must hurry back to England again, but this time Corinne must accompany him as his wife. This she refused to do, however, but promised to follow in another steamer to that which he proposed to take, and marry him immediately upon her arrival in London. To marry at once, she argued, would seem, in the eyes of his friends, a total lack of respect to his mother's memory.

He finally agreed to this arrangement, sadly and reluctantly enough.

"I cross the sea again," he said, "for the third time—the sea you love, but which to me is always something that allures, deceives, entraps. How many poor wretches trust themselves to its treacherous bosom, and are drawn pitilessly downwards into its ever-voracious maw? Ah! Corinne, how little do either of us know whether a similar fate awaits us, too!"

Corinne pressed his hand against her cheek.

"God is on the sea, as on the land," she said. "Even if He does not always say His 'Peace, be still,' to the raging waters, He may say it to the poor, despairing hearts engulfed therein, and give them strength to go through its darkness as calmly into the light of His kingdom as do those who lie on their own home bed, surrounded by their loved ones."

Corinne parted from Hugh the day he set sail with more loving warmth than she had yet found herself capable of returning him for the wealth of love and tenderness he constantly lavished on her; and Larry, who had hurried down for a day to "see him off" in "The Theseus," gave him more of a brother's grip than he had done for years.

An unaccountable feeling of sadness came over both as they waved till the ship was lost to view.

"I wish poor old Hughie did not look so solemn," said Larry, as at last they turned away. "I shan't

forget in a hurry that tragical phiz of his as the boat moved outward."

Nor was he to forget it all his life long, for "The Theseus," new boat though she was, went down, or was supposed to have gone down, off the coast of Africa, as "The Royal George" went down off England's coast long years ago.

The sea had taken him, and never gave him back—neither him nor the younger, blither hearts that had passed the hours with merriment and hopes of fuller life in other lands. Search was made in vain for the missing vessel. Many a wife's heart was to leap in vain at the sound of a step like her husband's on the threshold, many a mother's eyes to grow dim with gazing for the face of the son or daughter who was never to return. Many and gruesome tales were told of floating bodies seen by passing steamers, but never were the stories proved. Uncertainty shrouded everything connected with the ill-fated boat in mystery, and no whisper came from the relentless sea to tell how brave men died or pious women passed away.

In the lovely mansion of Poppledene neither master nor mistress reigned. She who would have taken up its honours gladly, and filled her place worthily, was now on her way back to her impoverished and disappointed family, a little the richer for her long visit, because of the legacy left her by the mother of the man she loved, but poor in her double loss—ay, a thousand times poorer than Corinne of Corral's Bluff.

Corinne mourned Hugh sincerely, but not as a widow mourns. The strain upon her every energy had been too great. After the loss of "The Theseus," she fell seriously ill, it is true, but it was more from the after-effects of the previous struggle to be all that was demanded of her by Sir Hugh's high belief in her absorbing devotion for him. He had exacted more from her than he had had any idea of. And then there had been the constant anxiety as to whether his intention to enter the Church was from conviction, not from any mere human desire to give her pleasure, and satisfy her mind. She had left no stone unturned, and had prayed fervently and unceasingly for the great boon.

"Ah, well, God is good," was Larry's comfort in his letters; "we do not know what grace was given Hugh's spirit ere it winged its flight."

Corinne's passage had been taken in another steamer leaving a few weeks later. Her "trousseau" had already been packed. Everyone who knew her pitied her, and would have condoled with her had she permitted. But Corinne returned, as quickly as possible, to the kind-hearted, if humble, folk down at Shellbeach, and in their home the illness came upon her which kept her chained to her bed for many a long day.

It was well that she was with old and tried friends, for, in her delirium, much of her past struggles with herself were betrayed, and Larry's name came often to her lips.

He came to see her once or twice, but a great barrier seemed to have risen up between them—the

barrier made by Hugh's untimely death. Corinne felt that she owed it to the dead to pay all tribute to his memory that his wife would have paid under like circumstances, and Larry, never more truly his friend, had the like feeling. They must continue as before, for how long he did not know, but long enough to forbid any breath of reproach to chill the future days.

Corinne returned to her old profession, though not at "Moritza," and, save the sending of a letter monthly to Dr. Hayes, and the receipt of one monthly from him, life flowed on as monotonously as before.

But, in due time, when the wills of the drowned of the ill-fated "Theseus" had to be proved, and Sir Hugh's relatives in the Old Country moved in the matter of his, it was found that he had left the bulk of his vast means to "my affianced wife, Corinne Marie Courboules," and the simple sailor's daughter was a wealthy woman.

A distant cousin lorded over Poppledene—beautiful Poppledene!—but there were other properties in Ireland and in Scotland which were now Corinne's indisputably.

Then, up went the second barrier—in poor Larry's estimation. For what was left for a poor, struggling country doctor to do but retire altogether into the background when the woman he loved, and had waited for, was suddenly become a person of riches beyond his counting?

Unconsciously to himself, his letters grew colder and stiffer, and, of course, he reaped the usual penalty where a woman is concerned—hers grew rarer.

He thought she did it purposely. He could not understand that the afternoon of Jim Barr's confession had so burnt itself into her memory that maidenly pride alone forbade the slightest advance on her part.

He—man-like—thought that, as she was quite aware of his love for her, no reassurance on that point was necessary. This is a world of cross-purposes, or life would flow on more monotonously than it does.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAP AND MASK OF ANY STAGE.

"In the obscurity of retirement, amid the squalid poverty and revolting privations of a hut, scenes of magnanimity and self-denial are often seen, as much beyond the belief as the practice of the great; a heroism borrowing no support, either from the gaze of the many or the admiration of the few, yet flourishing amidst ruins, and on the confines of the grave." Larry was daily proving this in his life among the dwellers on the mountains.

The pathos of decent poverty striving to hide its rags and keep up a presentable front is nowhere seen so much as where alluvial mining is carried on; nor is there such ungrudging hospitality anywhere more displayed than among these people that earn a precarious living with such simple tools. At Warren Creek and Blind Tim's Creek, the doctor, in his occasional visits thither—only summoned when his services were in urgent demand—found enough material for the writing of a dozen books, and wished from his heart that the mantle of a Bret Harte had fallen upon him, so that he might give to the world the many touching pictures which were so

often unconsciously spread before his observant vision.

"Australia," he thought, "is too often associated in the minds of those interested in her in other lands with the tales of 'old drunks,' and swagmen, and disreputable creatures of the early diggings type, and men turn from the gruesome tales of her male writers to the later-day American fiction, which, even if portraying the human beings of shady antecedents who are to be found in every new country, at least livens the picture with the dainty, poetical—but none the less true—touches which bring into strong relief the simple beauties of homely characters that keep an angel's shining wings beside them amid penury, disease, and other people's garbage."

He never sat down, however wearied, however disheartened, now, to bemoan his lot. He had learned to know the place and the people, as it takes years to know; and his purse was ever opening for the wants of the pain-distraught creatures, who rarely knew that the alleviations provided as a matter of course towards their miseries cost the doctor one-third of the money they did. He sent to Melbourne for numberless things which had never been known in that region before, and many an obstinate old man, who had set himself persistently against new ideas and remedies, was won over quietly by never being informed of the treatment followed till he was a happy convalescent once more.

Martha grew daily more indignant with "the liberties he takes with his health, the creature, sitting up at nights over some old brown book, studying, as he calls it, till he can't see out of the two eyes of him—and drawing all sorts of queer squiggles on bits of paper, an' usin' bottles of stuff that have queer enough smells to belong to a demon instid of to a Christian gentleman, doctor or no doctor!"

Yes, Dr. Hayes was studying hard, and experimenting much. Corinne soon learned that. Oh! how the nurse's instinct in her leaped—how she would have loved to toil beside him, to lend her strength to his, to carry out his plans as only she could! But, to all appearance, he was not anxious for a life-companion, and sometimes her heart grew heavy at the prospect of a second series of sorrowful and bitter-sweet memories to darken the glory of the womanhood the Creator had rendered so fit for service for such needs as those which called incessantly to Dr. Larry.

How much, how well, this unwanted wealth of hers could help him! What avenues it could open for the benefit of the destitute, sick, and suffering! Why, she had it in her power to build a hospital according to his own design, if she so desired! But he was too proud to avail himself of either her assistance or her patronage. And the worst of it was that she, too, would have to follow soon the same track over the sea which had proved so ill-fated for poor Hugh Lowenthal—his lawyers had written her that her presence in Kent was most

advisable. There was much to see to there, many matters to be straightened out. Rosalie Coudray was to go with her as maid. One of her first acts had been to lavish money and presents on the good, honest family who had ever been ready to welcome and shelter her under their roof; her next, to erect a fitting memorial over the grave of her parents and only brother, Antoine—the grave which faced the sea. The inscription was in French, and told that there lay those who had hearkened to the voice of God in the winds and waves of the sea, and prayed that, through His boundless mercy, their souls' barque might now be anchored where all was perfect peace.

The design was all that Sebastien would have cared for it to be—a plain marble cross and anchor, and a replica, in the same, of his old fishing-boat, which now hung from Coudray's rafters, hoisted up and kept in place by ingenious manipulation such as only an old sailor knows.

Jim Barr had, long before, disappeared from Cor-rall's Bluff. It was said that even his own father knew nothing of his whereabouts, and for this Corinne continually chastised herself beyond reason.

She was growing very thin, her friends told her; it was, they said, perhaps well that she should be obliged to take a trip across the seas. She had not even sea-sickness to dread, being a true daughter of the waters.

Few thought of the mental anguish that might be hers passing over the same path where one who had

loved her so well had fallen, never to rise in this world again. Only her great love of the sea was remembered, and that it would be but second nature for her to trust herself to it.

But Corinne's fondness for the sea would never again be the same! To the last day of her life she would hear on stormy nights Hugh's voice upon the wind, his farewell cry in the restless moan and splash of the waves as they beat upon the shore.

The sea might treat her with tender and infinitely loving regard, and bear her safely round the world and back again; but it had been cruel and treacherous to as true a heart as ever beat. It had freed her from a position which it had taxed all her moral and physical courage to endure—freed her, yes, but at what a cost!

The months went on at Musktown with little or no excitement to break the monotony, when, one day, a friend of Larry's chanced to arrive on holiday at the quiet township. He lost no time in finding the doctor out, whose first greeting to him was:

"Be the powers, but it's 'Splodger'!"

"Splodger" had received his nickname because of the length of time he had taken in getting through his examinations, likewise for being "a good old plodder." His proper name was Francis Wycherley.

The two medical men had a "terrific yarn," as they called it next morning, that night, and in the course of it Hayes found that Wycherley had met Corinne, and was informed that she was preparing to go "home" in two weeks' time.

"She's fallen off in looks; got very thin and pale, and lost all her old animation. She hates the idea of going so far, poor girl! I hear Isabel Lascelles is back with her own people—colder, but better-looking than ever. I heard that that ambitious mother of hers was much disgusted because she returned without an earl in tow, or something nearer royalty. Anyway, she only reached home in time to save the place being seized by Jewmoney-lenders. There were rumours everywhere that Lascelles was going to be sold up. His clever helpmeet could stem the tide no longer, with all her arts and crafts."

But Larry was not much interested in the Lascelles; the account given of Corinne was too disturbing. His heart smote him that he had not written more frequently to her—even if but formal letters. Somehow, he had pictured her as in the glow of health again, and, perhaps, in the state of feminine excitement unexpected wealth usually brings to the saddest.

For "good old Splodger" to notice a marked difference in her appearance meant much, as he was not too observant by nature.

"Hang her money!" he thought bitterly. "It has come between us like some mocking thing from the grave! I'll have to have a look at her before she goes, even if only professionally. I wish I could manage to catch a glimpse of her unknown to herself. That would prove a better test than 'hopping in' upon her unexpectedly. I'll take advan-

tage of 'Splodger' being here, and 'run down' to town for a few days."

He closely questioned Wycherley as to what her present whereabouts were, saying openly that he wished to bid farewell to her on his own account as well as that of his dead friend, and "Splodger" obligingly and unsuspectingly agreed to act for him in his absence.

It might, of course, be wiser and "more respectable" to wait till she returned to Victoria before seeing her again, but supposing the poor girl's heart was yearning for a kind word, an affectionate look, from the only living one she had the right—yes, the right, for had not the avowal of his love, made long ago, given it her?—to expect them from, now Hugh was dead.

And, "ten to one," he argued, "but that Hugh expects it of me, if these things are not hidden from the eyes of his spirit. I have an uncanny feeling that he's near me pretty often," and he thought of the long hours' study at night, when all Musktown was peacefully slumbering, and he worked on, and the strong feeling at times that the comrade of earlier student days was beside him.

When the feeling was strongest, he would pause in his work, and say a prayer for the soul that had been so unexpectedly summoned before its Divine Judge, and reflect a moment on the uncertainty of life. How often one stumble of his own horse in the dark might have hurried him over the precipitous sidlings of the mountains into eternity—dread

word, even when one has firm hold of faith's saving torchlight!

Dr. Hayes was a practical Catholic, and, though he had found on his arrival that bigotry was rampant in the district, he had never, for expediency's sake, or for any other, relaxed in any way from his usual pious customs, the ultimate result being that now he was respected by Protestant and Catholic alike.

As one old resident "put it"—and only "an old resident's" opinion is listened to with attention in the ranges—"No man, woman, or child, whatever they be or baint in religion, is let go to their Maker without their priest or their minister when Dr. Hayes has their case in hand. He don't forget the soul when he's looking to the body."

And, even as he contemplated his brief journey to Melbourne, a voiceless prayer ascended that none of those under his care as patients, on hill or in valley, might be called to their last account in his absence.

"'Splodger's' a good sort, and I must introduce him to Father Rafferty before I go."

Yes, "Splodger" was, in truth, a good sort, though not what he termed religious in the strict sense of the term, and he was that moment wearing—sewed inside the lining of his coat—the little badge of the Sacred Heart and the tiny medal which a Catholic wife had put there for him, with a tender prayer for his safe return on her pure lips.

"Splodger" had "a failing" now and again, but he would rather cut off his right hand than give in to its temptation while away on the holiday, which he had seen was a worry and an anxiety for his sake.

Martha's wrath burst bounds when she knew the doctor was "off to town on business."

"More fizzin' things, more ugly bottles, more dynamite blow-ups! I just know all the stuff that'll follow after him when he's coming back! I declare to goodness, I'd sooner see him take a fancy to bulldogs than be everlastin' mixin' up pastes and powders and the like. It's not many women at my time of life as 'ud stand it. I'd like to see the wife that would, that's all! An' this Mr. Witch that's in his place—why, isn't the very name of him enough to turn a woman's hair as white as the driven snow!"

CHAPTER XVI.

ISABEL AT HOME AGAIN.

"She hath got some added grace,
Which softens her once haughty face."

Mrs. Lascelles had not improved in Isabel's absence. Late hours and continuous planning for society's warfare had left indelible marks on her countenance which "took away" from the pleasing effect of regular features. Her scraggy neck looked a satire emboned in her low-necked evening dress, and her hair never appeared more false in its curled and abundant masses.

There was much which Isabel noticed and inwardly chafed against in the home "menage" that had never struck her before. She felt "out of gear with the whole machinery," as Larry would have expressed it, but was not conscious that this feeling was in a great measure due to the marked improvement which had taken place in her own character.

Mrs. Lascelles grew irritable under the calm eyes of the daughter whom she herself had helped to train, and longed for a stronger feeling of affinity than the years had seemed to develop.

"She does not seem like one of us at all now," she complained to Isabel's father, who was heavier and more stolid than of old, and much more weary of existence.

"No? Why, it appears to me, my dear, if you will pardon my being so rude as to disagree with you, that she seems more like a daughter now than ever before," he ventured, apologetically, pausing to take breath, for he was growing asthmatical.

And that was, indeed, the poor old gentleman's opinion, for never before in her life had Isabel shown any consideration for his comfort, while at present, to his intense surprise, he found himself being treated less and less like a figurehead, and more like the honoured father of a family for whom he had done his best in his own heavy, hippopotamus way, giving all, and exacting nothing.

Isabel had learned many a useful life-lesson while witnessing the invariable courtesy with which Sir Hugh Lowenthal had always treated his mother; and, moreover, she had so accustomed herself to paying the innumerable little attentions unconsciously exacted by the poor Countess that they now came as second nature to her where age and feebleness were. And there was no doubt of it that Mr. Lascelles would soon have to relinquish the duties which an active wife had kept him up to for many a long year.

Isabel, so far, was not proving selfish with the money left to her by Hugh's grateful mother. She seemed to find a pleasure in settling the more press-

ing of the family debts, and in refurnishing the home, which had been theirs so long that it would have been a severe wrench to even the most worldly of them to part from it.

She persisted in wearing mourning—ostensibly for “the Countess,” but really for Hugh, whom she mourned with more and deeper sorrow than Corinne, for he only had touched that heart.

Her pride helped her to hide every sign of deep feeling—and hide it most successfully from her own, which is the hardest task of all.

None knew how her heart throbbed to suffocation at the mere street-boy’s cry of “’Erald, ’Erald!” night after night; nor how she awoke at midnight, or in the heavy darkness that precedes the dawn, thinking she heard someone cry, “News of the ‘Theseus’ at last!”

No one would have believed how her heart bled beneath her calm exterior. She even looked handsomer, more attractive than of old. There was something in the still face and quiet eyes which ever caused a second glance. “More character than of old,” people said; but it was really more soul!

“The heart knoweth its own bitterness,” and she had drunk her life’s deepest draught of misery the day she heard of Hugh Lowenthal’s engagement to “a trained nurse.”

It was often a topic of discussion among her own family, and she listened as if perfectly indifferent, but more and more a painful curiosity seized her to be able to see this “Corinne” for herself—to gaze,

and search in her gaze, for the beauties and graces and charms which had the power to hold in thrall such a one as Sir Hugh Lowenthal.

But what woman has ever discovered in another woman the cause of a lover's infatuation? It is a problem as old as the hills themselves.

When she did see Corinne, it chanced to be in a florist's shop. The latter was pointed out to her by an officious lady friend as "the nurse poor Sir Hugh lost his head over."

Isabel carried away in her mental gallery a picture of a sad-faced, clear-complexioned girl, so lily-fair that the violets at her breast would have seemed too vivid a splash of colour save for the large, deep, wonderful eyes, which, once uplifted, never failed to impress; a tall girl, of perfect physique, but a girl whose expression was wistful, almost forlorn. For it had been one of Corinne's "gloomy" days, when sad memories were all uppermost, and there seemed no one to cling to in the wide, wide world.

"And this pale girl of the violets might have been my Lady Lowenthal, and queened it over dear old Poppledene! What would its grand old traditions be to her? Oh! my knight, my dear, dead, noble knight, was I so much less worthy than she to stand beside the gentlewomen of a rarer day, who smiled so often on me from the walls you taught me how to love!"

"I will never marry," she often whispered to herself. "If I have been done out of that which would have been most congenial to spirit, heart, and body,

and am neither betrothed nor wife to the man I loved, I can, at least, be widow to his memory."

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Corinne was growing apathetic. Rosalie, the energetic, was in despair at her listlessness in the last preparations for sailing. She threw up her little fat hands at her, and shrugged her pretty shoulders at her in vain. Corinne didn't care what was got, but let somebody else see to it; money was no object, but interest and excitement were not to be bought, and she could not simulate them.

Truth to tell, the girl's heart was breaking under the strain Larry was, with the most honourable intentions in the world, subjecting it to. She was beginning to feel that she was a being fated to go through this world without the sweet solaces given to so many women, and had begun to question as to whether it was not distinctly pointed out to her that hers should be the life of a religious.

The state of her nerves caused strange dreams to visit her—dreams in which she saw herself at the further end of the world habited as a nun, but, ever for rosary, shells instead of beads!

"Where the pale moon shines on the shifting sands,
Ever and ever a woman stands,
The Cross of Christ in her snow-white hands—
'Domine non sum dignus.'"

She knew she had no true vocation; not now, at any rate, while she yearned so strongly for that human love which she had thought was hers while life should last. But, perhaps, when she had crossed

the sea, she would have learned much from its familiar voice, and be given strength to work on as she had done through previous years—alone, utterly alone!

Near the boarding-house where she was staying during the last few days there stretched for some distance a spacious public park. To this she resorted when most despondent, and, choosing the shadiest and most retired spot, gave herself over to the memories of the past, for she had ceased to plan for the future save for the resolve to be as good a steward of her riches as God gave her light to be. She had already delighted Father Dalton's heart with munificent gifts to his parish, but the missionary world of the Church militant was calling to her yet.

One sunny afternoon, tired out after the morning's compulsory shopping, she slipped quietly out of the house, and went to her favourite seat in the park. It was unoccupied, and she sank on to it gracefully, and watched, through half-closed lids, the delicate tracery made upon the grass by the swaying leaves of sycamore and elm.

"I shall soon be looking my last here at this lovely embroidery of nature," she thought. "I shall soon be standing on the deck of a strange ship, with hundreds of others, as poor Hugh stood that day, and, among all who wave their good-byes, as his friends and I waved ours on that never-to-be-forgotten afternoon, there shall not be one whom I love as he loved me. And why? What have I done that I am treated so coldly? What have I done, unless

that one act of folly at 'Moritza' has never faded from his mind? But no, it cannot be that! He said he understood—I knew that he understood! He was always generous and manly, and he never thinks an unworthy thought. Oh, Larry, Larry, if it is Hugh's legacy that stands between us, then I would that it lay in the fathomless depths of the sea! Does he blame me for not telling Hugh my love for him had lessened? No, he would not do that, knowing all as he did, loving Hugh as he did. God knows I did everything for the best. My only desire was to do what was right. And, surely, you knew it, Larry—surely you knew it!"

She leaned her head against the hard back of the seat, and closed her eyes. Slow tears coursed down her cheeks. She looked white, worn, weary, tired out with thinking, with wrestling with problems which would not solve.

Larry was coming slowly over the grass towards her, but she neither saw nor heard him. The grass deadened the sound of his footsteps, and her eyes were closed. He stood still, a few yards from her, and marked, with deep pain and self-reproach, the inroad the year had made upon her.

She was not happy; that was very evident. Was she grieving for Hugh? Had she loved him the better after all, and had he, Larry, been mistaken in what he had read in those beautiful, expressive eyes? Was he cruel to break in upon her reverie? If she did not love him as he loved her, it would seem sacrilege to encroach on the dominion of the dead.

But reason could not keep the upper hand with Larry that day! His heart was fighting for its chance; his heart was throbbing tumultuously at the mere sight of the face he had yearned so long to see. He could not go away now for Hugh's sake, not even for Hugh's sake!

And, even as his heart impelled him, he moved a step forward; and this time Corinne heard him.

In a second, all languor, all sadness, all weariness faded from her face. The sweet "La France" roses he knew so well leaped into their place again, the eyes grew like stars in tender, dazzling welcome, the trembling lips grew red and dewy.

"Oh!" she said, "you here, Dr. Hayes! I thought you had forgotten me!"

There was nothing in the words, but, even had there been, the doctor was beyond gathering the sense of them. He only knew they were both there, "under the greenwood tree," and no other near, and that the time was come when he must know his fate, and lose no time in gaining the knowledge.

The truest lovers are, however, proverbially "tongue-tied," and Larry was no exception to the rule.

He sat himself down by Corinne's side, and gazed, and gazed his full of her lovely face, but left to her the embarrassing task of framing polite sayings when the whole being is in a tumult.

And how well she knew the language of those eyes!—those dear eyes, which had so plainly told

their tale at "Moritza"! But if he could not plead his cause with his tongue, what was a poor girl to do?

Suddenly he cleared his throat, and began to talk rapidly of his work up at Musktown, drawing pictures which were meant to show her how poverty-stricken a life it was for a woman to share. And, from that, he proceeded to enunciate vehement opinions as to the want of manliness in any man who, having nothing, tried to win a woman who had not only youth, beauty, goodness, but wealth.

"Are you trying to convince me of something, or are you trying to convince yourself?" she said, at last, smiling archly from under the brim of her very becoming hat. "If you are trying to convince me that a man who marries a rich woman is not justified in doing so, even if he truly loves her, then you have failed, for I would have but a poor opinion of the man who would let that woman live a lonely, unloved life—if she loved him, too, of course! More than that," she added, with a sudden catch of the breath, which was like a sob, "I would think him cruel—more cruel than a torturer, for the body soon succumbs, but the heart, the soul—they—they must live through it somehow, somehow!"

"Corinne! Corinne!"

All that had been so long kept down was in that appealing cry.

He bent over her, and looked deep into her eyes, now tear-wet.

"Corinne, you love me; you will be my wife? My darling, my heart's darling!"

And the whispering, swaying leaves, tracing still their patterns on the grass, sighed softly: "Why—didn't—you—say—that—before?"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ABSCONDING OF MARTHA.

Corinne didn't sail on the date arranged. As a matter of prosaic fact, all orders connected with her outgoing were cancelled, for she had entered upon a more important engagement, and other things had to wait. Dr. Hayes did not arrive till some days after the time he had told Martha to expect him, and there was great trouble in consequence.

For Martha, firmly believing that she had been "made a fool of," and that Dr. Wycherley was stepping into Dr. Hayes' shoes for good and all, owing to some deeply-laid plot, had given "notice," and had already flown to the only relations she boasted, fifteen miles beyond Musktown.

"My nerves won't stand it no longer," she had panted to sympathetic Cousin Susannah. "To see another man a-settin' down to Dr. Hayes' favourite supper, an' a-sniffin' at this, an' a-liftin' up of the other; an' then eatin' no more than would feed a dicky-bird, but walkin' up an' down, an' up an' down, an' singin', in a great hoarse voice, little skitherin' bits of songs from the pantymimes; an' then playin' the violin till the cock crowed in the mornin'—well,

look a-here, Susannah, it just kind of put the finishing touch to my poor brain! So I up an' says: 'I never had naught to do with witches nor witchylees, an' I'm not goin' to stay another night in this here house, an' you can keep your wages for some woman more of the set of yourself. An' tell Dr. Hayes from me, I wouldn't have a-thought he'd have played a faithful servant like me such a nasty trick. The 14th, says he, an' now it's the 21st!'

"What did he say?" asked Susannah breathlessly.

"Say? He just looked me up an' down, same as if I'd been only a monkey at the Zoo, an', says he, quite polite-like: 'Where do you feel the pain most, my good woman?' What are you laughin' at? There ain't nothin' to laugh at, as I can see! I could have flung a box-iron at him, I could, to see him a-sittin' down the minute after he said it, an' writin' me a proscription—me! as never knows more of an ache or pain except what he gave me himself in my nerves.

"I never waited for him to give it into my hand—'twas me well knew what it was! I just said: 'I'm goin' right off to my friends now, this very hour; an' there's victuals in the kitchen to be cooked, but they won't be cooked by Martha Muggins! I don't want no bromide.'

"An' I was as good as my word, an' went to my room, an' started to pack my boxes. But that weren't all! While I was havin' a bit of a cry—soft-like—puttin' away the presents Dr. Hayes was always makin' me whenever I did a bit extra in the

place, I smelt the lamb chops cookin' that I'd put away tidy in the meat-safe; an', thinkin' Dr. Witchly might 'a' gone an' got someone from across the way, just to spite me like—for I knew they wouldn't stay—I jest crept down the passage, an' peeped in.

"An' there, right in my own kitchen—my own kitchen, which I'd made as clean as Hambleton's dairy—who was standin' over the fire, grillin' the chops, an' lookin' as cool as a cucumber, but the Witchly man hisself! No, I'm tellin' you no story, Susannah Garton. There he was—an' the impudence of the creature, doctor or no doctor—he'd actually put on for an apron the clean, red-bordered tablecloth which I lays my own meals on! Did ever you hear the like of that?"

"He's a married man—must be," said Susannah—"unless he burned them chops, of course—and lamb so dear now!"

"He didn't burn 'em," Martha owned. "No, they was just done to a turn when he took 'em off, an' the potatoes, too. An' that didn't content him, either!—he went and washed up, afterwards, exact same as if he'd been a woman."

"Laws!" ejaculated Susannah admiringly. "I think I know which one I'd like to work for best! Give me the man as can cook his own chops, I say! Why, Dr. Hayes couldn't put a hand out in the kitchen without spillin' something, or breakin' something, I've heard you tell, yourself."

"An' bless every inch of him for a gentleman, why should he?" said Martha tartly. "He knows his place—and that ain't in the kitchen!"

Larry laughed immoderately when told the story by "Splodger," who was not without a sense of humour.

"She needed a holiday, I think," he said. "Poor old Martha! But she needn't have served me such a disagreeable trick, all the same. How on earth did you manage? Why didn't you get some woman in to cook for you, if you had to 'shy' at visiting an hotel?"

"I got on famously without the aid of the 'gentler' sex," said "Splodger" placidly. "When Meg's sick, you know, I learn a thing or two in the housekeeping line! And, as far as calls to the hills went, not a soul came near me. You, or nothing, was evidently the watchword! When I went up to 'Moritza' I was given my meals, of course, an' so didn't have to trouble about them. By the bye, I had a bit of a 'go-in' with that Miss Dunraven, the matron! She's a bit on the cruel side, eh? I saw one or two needless bits of torment myself; the woman seems to have lost all natural feeling."

"She never had any," said Larry. "But the place will soon be looked after all right. Corinne's going to buy it."

"Good!" cried Dr. Wycherley, slapping his knee. "But hasn't she gone away, then?"

"No," answered Larry, with a smile so illuminating that even "Splodger" rushed to a conclusion,

"You don't say so! You lucky beggar, do you mean to tell me you've wooed and won the lovely, plucky little woman yourself! So that was why I was left alone in my glory so long? Well, God bless you both; and if He makes you as happy as my Meg and me, you'll have nothing to complain of. It's no wonder 'important business' detained you; I see it all now!"

"I have cared for her for years," said Laurence—"long before she gave a thought to me. She has gone through much in that time, but, please God, none of that suffering shall return! It will not be my fault if she is not a happy wife. She has to go to the 'Old Country' eventually; she cannot get out of that, but—we hope to go together! There are no near relatives of poor Hugh's that we could either shock or hurt, and I feel perfectly convinced he would not have desired her to go so far alone. We would infinitely prefer that he had left his money otherwise; I do not intend to handle a penny of it, and Corinne feels as if she but held it on trust, so it is likely to be all spent in charitable purposes."

"You could buy a practice somewhere else than in this secluded spot later on," suggested Dr. Wycherley. "There is too much hard work for you here, young man though you are."

"I shall not leave Musktown," answered Larry, squaring his jaw. "I am just 'coming into my own kingdom' of late. Nobody could credit what a battle I had here at first, the people were so antagonistic. I haven't broken them in for somebody else, thanks!

No; we intend to stay here, build our home here, work among the people here, and make 'Moritza' the most up-to-date and best-managed place of its kind in Australia! Sounds 'a large order,' doesn't it?—but it's wonderful what can be done with money, perseverance, and—ahem!—brains."

"You won't sally forth after the fair Martha, then, now that things are likely to be so totally changed for you?"

"Indeed, but I shall!" cried Larry. "Why, I wouldn't lose good old Martha for a hundred pounds, if you gave me that sum this minute!"

"I'd cheerfully lose her for the one-hundredth of that," said "Splodger," with a grimace. "But there's no accounting for tastes!"

And, next day, Larry set off in pursuit of the estimable Miss Muggins, whom he had sorely missed on his return, in spite of the fact that "Splodger" had provided what both termed "a rattling good supper" on his arrival.

By this time Martha, like "Meddlesome Matty" of the nursery rhyme, had begun "to repent sincerely." Susannah's children were many and noisy, and every day was washing-day. Her soul hankered after the peace and spotless cleanliness of the doctor's villa in Musktown, where, "if she was a slavey of mornin's, she could play the lady in the afternoons," and be treated as either with both respect and consideration.

"I'd never have a 'down' on them nasty blue bottles again, if I only was back, an' he sittin' there

hissself! Fiddles of nights is worse than any of the other claptrap, an' far more wearin' on the nerves. If he never comes back from town, I'll go sorrowin' all my days after a real kind master, which no one can hold a candle to, try as they will; an', if he does return—well, he ain't one of the hard-hearted sort, an' some of these days I might pluck up courage to sneak in the back way, an' tell him I am real sorry."

She summoned up all the "Dutch" courage she had when she saw him coming down the hill after her! But when he had really dismounted, and flung the reins of "Darby" to one of the grinning boys watching, she collapsed utterly, and he only found a grey-haired old woman sitting on a broken-backed chair, weeping copiously into a blue apron.

He stood at the door, with his arms akimbo.

"So, at your time of life, Miss Muggins, you turned skittish when once you thought you had lost sight of me, and nothing would you do but leave an honest and kindly gentleman, who was doing me a good turn as 'locum,' and flying out to the hills here, to prove, for Heaven knows how many centuries of time, the inconsistency and unreliableness of woman! Well, you may weep for your sex!—I'm ashamed of you!"

"Oh! Oh! Deary, dear! Deary, dear!" moaned Martha at intervals; then, as he concluded, lifted up a raw-red face, wet with tears, to say: "It was the fiddle that did it—the fiddle, sir—screechin' mornin', noon, and night!—an' I couldn't a-bear him a-settin' in your chair, an' eatin' off your dishes, an' you not

there—an' not knowin' but you'd cleared out an' left me in the lurch, an' him with such a uncanny name as made me think of the black ages an'——"

"That'll do, now!" said the doctor, with a show of sternness, which so upset Susannah's gravity that she had to retire to the little back room to vent it. "Get up this minute, you hard-hearted piece of feminine goods, and make me a decent cup of tea, for I'm 'half-dead with the drouth,' as Darby out there will tell you; an' all for what, I'm asking? To tell a foolish woman that Martin M'Nally will be here for her first thing in the morning, to bring her back to a home too comfortable for her deserts! Think of that, now! Isn't it heaping the proverbial coals of fire upon your unworthy head? Two lumps of sugar, please! Bless the woman, has she forgotten even that much already?"

The more he scolded, the better Martha liked it. It meant forgiveness utter and complete, for Dr. Hayes never did anything by halves.

"You'll be well paid out," he remarked grimly, on parting, "for Dr. Wycherley isn't accustomed to washing clothes, however clever he may be at other things, and there's a heap of linen enough to frighten a Commonwealth laundry into epilepsy! Of course, I could call in at old Bess Burrows' on the way?"

"Indeed, an' you'll not need to do any such cranky thing, savin' your presence, doctor! I wouldn't have the like of that old trollope round my kitchen

for all the gold in the Dividing Range. Cleanin' up after the like of her!—I'd like to see myself do it!"

The doctor laughed long and low to himself as he rode on.

"Human nature, what a queer thing you are!" he thought.

All through his long time of waiting for Corinne he had never passed a day without being somewhat enlivened by his experiences among the rough and unlettered, and no priest, at one with his parish of high and low, loved his people, understood his people, better than did Dr. Larry Hayes.

With Corinne at his side, he hoped to bring more brightness, more comfort, more education, not only of book-learning, but of that "first aid" we ought all to be able to render one another, into the lives of the dwellers in lonely spots. He would not change one district for another, not only because of his affectionate regard for these mountaineers, but because he believed that human nature was "much the same everywhere."

"Just as one cannot escape the carrying of his cross," he thought, "we cannot escape having to mix with persons whose ideas are so totally different to ours that we jar upon each other whenever obliged to come in contact. We cannot escape 'our neighbour'; and, if we do succeed in such a feat—well, that way madness lies!"

Green hill and valley, never had their prospect pleased him more. In his dreams Corinne rode beside him as rode the ladies of old upon their palfreys beside their true knights. "We were made for each other," his heart sang, "and it is through the infinite goodness of God that things are as they are."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE SWORD ROCK.

Corinne had one sad little rite to perform in the midst of her new-found joy, and this she must do alone.

The ring which she had worn for so brief a time she felt had never been truly hers. The valuable stones within it, the pearls and the diamonds, she now had taken out by a jeweller and despatched as an anonymous gift to a struggling Sisterhood, which would hasten to turn them into money for the benefit of their noble work.

The circlet itself she would return to the spot where Hugh had first secreted it. She would give one whole day to his memory—a day which Larry would never begrudge her—and then she would enter with gratitude upon the path which had been so mercifully ordained for her.

One lovely summer morning she stood once more beside the Sword Rock, which had played so important a part in her life's story, and knelt down and prayed in its shadow with a fervency which seemed to absorb her spirit into the boundless spaces above,

and to bring her closer still to him for whom she pleaded.

When she arose, she walked over to the waters, which were murmuring in the sunshine that day as sweetly as a clear running brook of the mountains!

"I only desire to know one of your secrets," she said sadly, following their flow with her eyes till it reached the line which borders sea and sky. "I only want to know one thing which could make me happy and contented all my days, whatever befell me of unexpected care or sorrow—and that is if the dear one now gone, who loved me so much, died with the prayer of a Catholic on his loyal lips!"

No answer gave sea, or sky, or wind, or bird.

And she walked along the beach shivering disconsolately. She had prayed so hard—God alone knew how hard—that Hugh might be brought to a knowledge of the Saviour's one true Fold; she had beaten on the door of Heaven with violence, as the Scriptures had bidden in such clear and unmistakable language. And Father Dalton and numerous other devoted priests and nuns of every Order had offered Mass after Mass for him at her earnest solicitation. Yet she was not to know—never to know "till the sea gave up its dead"—whether those prayers had been answered! The Holy Sacrifice could plead on for his soul, it was true—but, oh! the joy it would have been for her poor human heart to find that even here on earth her beloved friend's eyes had been opened to the truths of the Church!

On and on her feet led her, and now the rocks were higher, the cliffs steeper. A sharp-edged rock scratched her kid shoe, and she bent down to ascertain whether it was cut.

Thrown up from the sea was the usual mass of miscellaneous waste.

Rocking to and fro in the waves, she saw a bottle which seemed to be securely fastened at the top; and, feeling curious, she lifted it out of the water. It had something inside it—paper, it appeared to be.

A sudden thought struck Corinne, which made her feel so faint that she sank down on the wet rock, and waited till her heart beat normally again.

She kept fast hold of the bottle the while. It was a treasure now.

It seemed utterly absurd to imagine it might be a bottle thrown from a sinking vessel; and yet—and yet—such things had happened, and would happen as long as anyone had a loved one to send a message to, be they on the other side of the world!

She made a desperate effort to collect her energies, and prayed aloud.

"I must open it! Oh, dear Lord, help me to open it!—and, if there be no message for me in answer to my prayers, give me at least strength to bear the bitter disappointment."

She forced the lid off with some difficulty, and very slowly drew out the piece of paper.

Then, when she at last had the paper between her fingers, she paused again, feeling unable to proceed any further.

"I must go back to the Rock—the Sword Rock," she thought, "before I read it. I shall feel safer there. Oh, I hope and trust Father Dalton will be up to time! It wants but twenty minutes to the hour he said he would come for me."

We all have had experience of a presentiment which silently proclaims that some event above the common is in store for us, and Corinne had precisely the same feeling which foreshadows some revelation—and she was alone, and not equal to the bearing of any sudden shock, for her heart had not, by any means, reached its former magnificent high-tide.

She made her way back, trembling like a leaf, while the waves continued to murmur lovingly the old lullabies to their adopted child.

Sitting under the Sword Rock, on the exact spot where poor Hugh Lowenthal had knelt to make his vow, her shaking fingers managed to unfold the paper.

As soon as she saw the familiar handwriting of her dead lover, her senses swam, and she knew no more.

Father Dalton found her in a swoon which seemed death-like, and marvelled much as he loosened her neckband, and sprinkled her face with water, till he suddenly caught sight of the words on the paper

lying beside her: "Ship going down. No hope. Die as a man and a Catholic. God bless you, my Corinne, my darling, my sweetheart! I hold fast to the Cross and the Faith of our Fathers. May the Sacred Heart of Jesus have mercy on my soul and the souls of these poor shrieking people.—HUGH A. LOWENTHAL."

With a joyful prayer of gratitude on his lips, the good priest bared his head, and then redoubled his efforts to restore Corinne to consciousness.

"Poor little girl! Poor little girl!" he murmured. "God grant it be not too great a shock."

When he saw her eyelids flickering, he began to speak cheerily.

"That's right; rouse yourself up, dear child! Good news for you!—news for which we must both thank the good God on our bended knees!"

"Hugh?" her white lips formed rather than said.

"Yes, Hugh died as a man and a Catholic—'and a Catholic'! Now, try to grasp that mercy of the Almighty Father's, and it will restore you more quickly than anything which could be got for you."

Corinne was now in a sitting position.

"Read it for me, Father!" she begged huskily.

So the kind old priest read the lines slowly to her, and over and over, so that she could not fail to grasp the full meaning of them; and at last he had his reward, for a torrent of healthful tears came to her relief, and she was soon able to kneel with him while they recited one of the grand psalms of praise

which seem the words of angels, and have the music of the organ divine.

"There is nothing left to wish for now," she said on the way back, "except to hear some good news of poor Jim Barr."

Father Dalton sighed.

"I'm afraid that may not be vouchsafed you, my child! Be content that you never hear from him at all. He loved you very truly, no doubt, and had many sterling qualities, but he was never meant for you; and all you can do for him is to remember him in your prayers sometimes, and ask that he be sent the helpmeet his peculiar nature needs."

"Which I do," thought Corinne; "nevertheless, never was there a woman yet, I suppose, who did not wish to hear of the well-being of the man, boor or gentleman, who gave her in full measure the first and best love of his heart!"

"How pleased Larry will be!" she remarked later. "I must write this very night, and tell him all about it."

"Yes," agreed Father Dalton; "and will you allow me to say, my dear young lady, that you are a person who has been most singularly blessed? You have had the sincere affection of three honest men, and you are about to marry the best of the three. Such good fortune does not fall to many in this world of ours, where things go so easily wrong. You are no longer Corinne of Corral's Bluff, but Corinne of a wider, happier realm!"

"I shall never forget the dear old Bluff, all the same," said Corinne, with a tender burst of feeling. "It seems too bad that I have done absolutely nothing for it. You shall point me out one day, Father, something which I can put up as a sort of monument of gratitude for happy childhood's days, and the sheltered life of my early girlhood."

"It shall be a 'living' monument, then," said Father Dalton drily. "Very good, my child; perhaps I shall hold you to your promise when you least expect it!"

.

Larry had to break the news of his approaching marriage to Martha somehow, so he had a photograph of Corinne framed handsomely, and hung in his bedroom. He knew Martha's duster would be sure to reach it in time, and then would come questions, the answering of which would be the best "breaking of the news" that he could devise.

Some mornings afterwards, Martha invaded his study, a big white cloth enveloping her head, and giving her an awesome and Eastern appearance.

"There's the picture of a good-lookin' young woman in your room; I just knocked a spider off it! Ain't it the same as came here one night to go up to that Miss Dunraven's as nurse?"

"The self-same," answered the doctor, a pen between his teeth, and his hand searching for an envelope between the tiny shelves of his writing-desk.

"She didn't look the sort to give a big photograph of herself to anybody for nothing?"

"She didn't," agreed the doctor, addressing the envelope rapidly.

"She ain't on the stage now, is she?"

"She isn't."

"For them hussies' pictures fly about everywhere; an' no woman as looks up to herself would fret about dustin' 'em! Do you mean it to stay there?"

"By all means!" answered the doctor, in a startled tone. "You surely weren't contemplating removing that lady's picture?—that lady's 'honoured' picture, I should say! If you want one to hang in the other rooms, I can supply them."

"Lawks-a-mussy!" came in muffled but dismayed tones from the door.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Muggins?"

"Oh, sir! oh, doctor, don't be Miss-Muggin' me! I hope as I haven't offended you, but you ain't the sort of a man as likes females' photygraphs hangin' about the place; an' I jest felt afeard you might be fallin' in with play-actors, like."

"No, no, Martha! That lady's portrait has every right to be in my house. She is to be my wife very shortly."

"Your wife? Oh, oh! Deary me! deary—deary—me!"

"Why, what's the matter, Martha? It will make no difference to you!"

"No differ to me? What young lady with town ways would want me? Oh, why did I ever leave Susannah's!"

And she suddenly pulled the white wrapping off her head, clapped it to her face, and disappeared.

"Beef charred to a cinder, vegetables half-cooked," thought the doctor ruefully, even as his smile broadened. "Oh, well, I suppose that's worth bearing for your sweet sake, Nurse Cora!"

And he bore it so heroically that Martha consented to let herself be talked over into promising she "would work, tooth and nail," to carry out all the projects for brightening up, and making pleasant to behold, the bachelor quarters which had been so bare and unhomely too long.

"There ain't no woman good enough for you; but if you've made up your mind to be married, married you'll be; an' I must make the best of it, hopin' your wife'll make the best o' me."

"That's true philosophy, Martha, and I've no doubt we shall be as happy as sandboys!"

And so they were.

.

Away on the plains of the Never-Never, Jim Barr toils through drought and flood unweariedly, silent for hours at times, though his mate works beside him. Hard work, steadiness, and reliability fill his purse, but his heart is still empty. He listens attentively, to all seeming, to the romances of other men, when rest, a smoko, "a drink," and the camp-

fire have made the hearts of these soft and reminiscent; but he has nothing to say either for them or for himself.

But the sombre eyes, gazing so intently into the glowing coals, see more and fairer pictures than do they; and, in the voices of the winds outside, he hears the call of the surges as they dash in upon the rocks at Corrall's Bluff.

Sometimes he sketches absently while others gossip, but always the same grim cliffs—an arm of one of which projects in the shape of a sword.

Once only he sketched the slight and graceful figure of a young girl looking seaward, as he likes to believe she looks sometimes—and thinks, maybe, a kindly thought of him.

Some day he may return; but that will be only when he has so far forgotten that he can walk unmoved along the beach, and hear the waves she loved murmur—as they ever murmured to him—of Corinne, the white dream-flower of Corrall's Bluff!

[THE END.]

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